POPPY OTT DETECTIVE STORIES

THE MONKEY'S PAW

LEO EDWARDS

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THE MONKEY'S PAW

POPPY OTT DETECTIVE STORIES

THE MONKEY'S PAW

BY

LEO EDWARDS

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THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED

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THE MONKEY'S PAW

CHAPTER I

A STRANGE COMMISSION

THE hot summer sun was high in the sky when I awoke.

"Jumpin' catfish!" I cried, as I saw the time on the clock. "What's the matter around this house anyway?"

Jumping out of bed I ran into dad's room to see if he was sick. I never had known him to sleep this late before. It was a fixed rule of his, too, that when breakfast was ready I had to be there.

But his bed was empty!

There was a tumult then at the back door as three of my chums tumbled in like a hurricane.

"There he is, fellows!" shrieked Jerry Todd, at sight of me. "Go for him!"

"What's the big idea?" I cried, as they took me down in my pajamas and began whacking me.

"Oh, you can't fool us, Poppy Ott," laughed Peg Shaw. "We know it's your birthday."

"Have a heart!" I begged, as the whacking

grew hotter. "Gosh! Don't kill me. I want to enjoy some more birthdays."

"How many years did you say, Jerry?" asked Scoop Ellery, letting up momentarily.

"Sixteen, and one to grow on," Jerry called out merrily.

"Sixteen?" said Scoop. "Gee!—I forgot where I left off."

"Well, call it sixteen and quit," I begged.

"All right," laughed Scoop, as he got ready for the final smack. "There's the one to grow on. Now go in your bedroom and dress—you lazy lout."

Jerry came with me and sat on the bed.

"Were you just getting up?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, as I got a clean shirt out of the dresser drawer.

"How did you happen to sleep so late? Just because you were sweet sixteen to-day?"

"Oh, I thought I'd be accommodating," I joked, "and keep my pajamas on till you strong-armed bums got here."

"Oh, yeah?" Jerry laughed skeptically.

Then I told him the truth.

"Dad forgot to call me," I explained. "He and I are all alone, you know."

"I saw him when he got on the train this morning," said Jerry, as he lolled on the bed.

I stopped, with my shirt half buttoned, and stared.

"You saw him what?" I asked.

"When he got on the train—at the depot."

"You mean," I further stared, "that he went away this morning, on the train?"

"Yes, didn't you know about it?"

"No," I shook my head.

"He was all dressed up in his Sunday suit. When I asked him if he was going to Chicago—for he was headed that way—he just shook his head like he was troubled about something. Is it something at the factory, Poppy?"

"Gosh!" I spoke, bewildered. "I don't know. He never told *me* he was going away. And you say he looked troubled?"

"I thought so," Jerry faltered. "But maybe he was just thinking about something."

Peg came running then with a letter.

"Did you see this, Poppy?"

"What is it?" I asked quickly.

"A letter from your dad. It was on the table."

I took the letter and read it.

Here it is:

Dear Poppy:

I am going away this morning unexpectedly, to be gone for some time, and want you to follow me, and do exactly as I say, however nonsensical it may seem to you. Under my pillow you will find a check that you are to

cash at the bank, as you will need money where you are going. Together with this check is a cipher which matches another similar cipher which will be carried by a friend whom you will meet at the entrance to Whispering Towers, a country estate near Rockcliff, Wisconsin, at three-thirty this afternoon. By putting the two halves of the cipher together, and by using your heads, you and your new friend will know just how to proceed. You must not fail in this nor fail to be at the Towers at the specified time. But before going there, stop in Rockcliff and provide yourself with a dozen frankfurters and buns, and some mustard, for the kind of sandwiches boys like so well. Thus equipped for identification, you will proceed to the Towers, as instructed, and build a fire just outside the gate, and there cook the frankfurters, the first of which should be ready by three-thirty. Here you will meet your new friend, who will be identified by his red hair. But for further identification he will say to you, "Do you sell red-hots to red-heads?" Your reply should be, "Yes, if you can pay me in Indian heads." Satisfied of his identity, you may then secretly compare your half of the cipher with his and then act accordingly. I am providing you with transportation and shall depend on you

to carry out your part of this unusual yet very necessary commission to the letter. Use your wits!—it is the last hopeful appeal of

Your troubled father,
Horatio C. Ott

I had known my father to do some very queer things, as he had a lot of odd whimsical ways. But here was something that completely baffled me.

I couldn't make head nor tail of it. In the first place I couldn't understand why he should go off that way so suddenly and mysteriously. Nor could I comprehend why he wanted me to follow him, and do the odd things he had specified. Red-hots for red-heads! It sounded like silly kid stuff. But the fact remained that something unknown to me *had* happened suddenly, to send him off troubled on a moment's notice. And here was his written appeal to me to help him. Also, when I looked in his bed, I found the mentioned check and cipher.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars!" cried Jerry, when I dizzily showed him the check. "Cats and crickets! That's a young fortune."

"Do you know what I think?" Peg put in soberly, after lengthy study of the letter.

"What?" I asked eagerly, glad to get any kind of an opinion on the puzzling affair.

"I think your pa's gone cuckoo."

"Oh, no?" Jerry put in hastily. "Don't you believe that, Poppy. Your pa's all right."

"Of course he is," Scoop quickly sided in.

"Just the same," waggled Peg, in that dogged way of his, "it sounds blamed cuckoo to me. Red-hots for red-heads! And what's the name of that place where you're supposed to go and cook the red-hots?"

"Whispering Towers," I supplied.

"Humph!" Peg gave an expressive grunt. "Fairy-tale stuff, if you ask me, and nothing else but."

"Now, I wouldn't be so sure of that," argued Jerry. "It's out in the country—the note says so. And country places often get queer names."

"But how could a place get a name like that," snorted Peg, "unless it had ghosts around it? I bet it's in the middle of a grave-yard."

"Maybe you're right about pa," I told Peg, worried, as I studied the letter. "It does sound crazy."

"Crazy nothin'," Jerry swung in. "Your pa's in trouble of some kind and wants you to help him. Crazy people don't write out checks for two hundred and fifty dollars, I can tell you."

"I wonder if he's got that much in the bank," Peg spoke bluntly.

"Of course he has," I replied stiffly. "And a lot more too."

"Red-hots for red-heads!" Peg snorted again. "I wonder who the red-head is—a *he* or a *she*?"

"Why, it must be a *he,* of course," I spoke quickly. I guess I colored up too, for the other fellows laughed.

"You better look out," chuckled Peg, to tease me, "or maybe you'll come home with a red-headed wife. In some states you *can* get married when you're sixteen."

"You're a lot of help," I growled at him.

"But where's that cipher?" asked Scoop curiously. "Maybe we can get something out of that."

"Oh, yes," I said, fishing in my shirt pocket. "Here it is. I forgot all about it."

"L-o-i-t-s-h-a," Scoop began at the top and spelt down part way. "That doesn't make sense," he puzzled.

"I imagine it would be plain enough," I said, as we all studied it, "if we had the other half. There's how they fit together—see? The other half fits right against this half."

"Maybe it's some kind of a marriage ceremony," Peg tried further to tease me.

"Oh, pipe down," I told him.

"And why not?" he ran on, his eyes dancing. "There's the word 'monk'—and monks can marry people. A monk is just the same as a priest. And look at the next word—'pa.' That means your pa gives his consent."

"Shall I throw him out, Poppy?" Jerry laughed.

"I wish you would," I spoke, troubled.

The clock struck nine.

"Gee!" cried Jerry. "You'll have to get going if you expect to get there this afternoon. Wisconsin's a long ways off, boy."

"But how am I going to go?" I cried helplessly.

"Take some of your money and buy an old car," suggested Peg.

I went back to the letter.

"It says, 'I am providing you with transportation.' I wonder if that does mean for me to buy a car?"

"Or you can go on the bus," suggested Jerry.

Here an automobile horn honked musically out in front.

"Ah-ha!" laughed Peg quickly, with a triumphant air. "The magician waves his magic wand, and—presto!—a new car appears at the hero's door."

"More likely," I grinned, "it's the milkman honking for some jack. We haven't paid our bill for two months."

"No," cried Jerry, in the doorway, "it's the garage man, Poppy. He's got a brand new blue roadster. Oh, baby! Is that a car, or is that a car?"

"What's that?" cried Peg quickly, as he elbowed the rest of us aside. "Let me see."

"Hey, Poppy!" the garage man called, when he saw us in the doorway. "Come on out here—I've got a birthday present for you."

But I couldn't budge. For this, coming on top of all the other surprises, simply paralyzed me.

Peg gave me a shove.

"Well, go on and get it," said he. "Don't be dumb."

Once started I kept going.

"Well, how do you like it?" grinned the pleased garage man, when I came up open-mouthed.

"Is it really mine?" I asked, staring at it.

"Nothing else but. Your pa closed the deal early this morning. But he told us we weren't to deliver it till after nine o'clock. Jump in and try it."

So I got in and drove off, with the garage man watching beside me to make sure that I did everything correctly, and the other fellows piled excitedly in the rumble seat.

But I didn't go far, as I had a big trip ahead of me. And having satisfied the dealer that I could handle the car—for I had driven others—I dropped him, at his garage, and then hurried home to pack.

The other fellows stood around with long faces.

"I wish I was going with you," Jerry spoke longingly.

"I do, too," I told him feelingly.

"Yes," put in Peg, wanting to give me a final jab, "you may need him if that new friend of yours turns out to be a red-headed widow."

"Phooey on you and your red-headed widow," I laughed.

The unusual letter, at first, had worried me. But I didn't feel worried now. For I don't know how a fellow of my age could have felt worried with a car like that, and enough cash in his pockets to take him halfway around the world.

No, I wasn't a bit worried. But I *was* terribly mystified, and excited.

With my clothes packed in a leather bag, and the house locked up, I jumped into the neat little car and drove off, my chums waving behind.

I watched them in the mirror as they grew smaller and smaller. And I particularly tried to keep Jerry in sight as long as possible. Of the three, he meant the most to me. Little did I dream then, as his reflection finally faded out, of the amazing adventures that were to befall me before we met again.

CHAPTER II

WHISPERING TOWERS

THERE was a time, a few years back, when I didn't think so much of my old dad. He wouldn't work then and take care of me, as a father should. I couldn't get him to stay in one place for more than a day or two at a time.

Following the early death of my mother, we had left Tennessee together in a rickety covered wagon. And from then on, until we finally settled so happily in Tutter, that was the only home I knew. Our slow jogging travels took us into and out of a dozen states. In the winter we sought the warmer southern sections. When spring came again, we circled north.

I didn't mind it at first. Having lost my mother, I was even glad to get away from the places that were so full of painful memories of her. Only a boy who has similarly lost a mother or father will know how I felt. But I tired of the roving life in time. It was just the same thing day after day, constant traveling but nothing gained. Besides I didn't like the way people acted toward us. They called us tramps, as we became more ragged. Several times they even put dad in jail for vagrancy.

Mother had told me to keep myself clean and go to school. A boy couldn't hope to make much of himself, she had said, if he didn't get an education. But for more than two years I never saw the inside of a schoolhouse. In the many towns that we passed through, with our lumbering half-starved old horse, I saw other boys and girls going happily to school. Toward the last, as I began to realize how true my mother's advice was, I longed to be among them. I was getting to be a big boy, with long gangling legs and a mop of hair that I had to cut myself for lack of money, and I didn't know beans.

I asked dad then why we couldn't stop somewhere so that I could go to school like other boys of my age. But the restless shiftless ways that he had fallen into since our loss, had a terrible grip on him. He wouldn't listen to me. That is when I began to feel ashamed of him. As people said, he was nothing but a shiftless roving tramp, with no pride or ambition, and he was making the same kind of a useless tramp out of me.

What should I do?—run away and leave him, and shift for myself? I was old enough to. But somehow I knew my mother wouldn't want me to leave him. She had put up with him. And he *was* my dad after all. So I gave up the thought of running away. For a time I satisfied myself with some old schoolbooks that I had picked up

in a rag-shed. You can imagine what kind of books they were! I learned a lot from them nevertheless, and I still have them.

Dad had always wanted to be a detective—a silly notion of his. When I was born he gave me the simple name of Nicholas Carter Sherlock Holmes Ott. Maybe he thought that would work some kind of magic in his favor, and help him toward his favored goal. Or maybe it was just his way of honoring his two favorite detective heroes. Anyway, that's the name he gave me. As soon as I began to talk, he taught me to repeat the name with pride. But I soon got over that, for when I started to school in the mountains the other boys laughed at me. In time, to my great relief, the nickname of Poppy became attached to me.

Poppy Ott! That was a million times better than Nicholas Carter Sherlock Holmes Ott.

Then, as you know, if you have read the earlier stories that my good pal Jerry Todd has written about me, dad and I finally landed in Tutter, Illinois, a small town in La Salle county. There my fortunes changed completely and the happiest part of my life began. Dad, awakened to his responsibilities at last, actually went to work, with real purpose. And I went back to school.

We had a little home in Elm Street, as mentioned in my first chapter, where we kept things just as neat and proper as we knew how. In-

stead of calling us tramps, the neighbors respected us now. Their respect for dad grew as he took hold of a little stilt business that Jerry and I had started in an old carriage factory, and made a big thing out of it.

To-day he's considered one of the shrewdest business men in town.

I knew that he had money in the bank, as I had told Peg. I knew, too, from things he had let drop lately and from his general manner, that he was planning to make a big thing of my sixteenth birthday. But I never dreamed of getting a car like this, or of being sent off so mysteriously.

Yet here I was, driving north toward Rockcliff, now but a few miles ahead of me, in one of the niftiest sky-blue roadsters that you ever set eyes on. Boy!—it was a darb, with its powerful six-cylinder motor and low rakish lines. A boy's car, if there ever was one! It purred like an airplane, and at the slightest pressure of the foot feed it shot forward like a dart.

I had sensibly kept it down to thirty, or less, all the way, so it had taken me almost six hours to cover the one hundred and seventy miles between Tutter and my mystifying destination.

A sudden turn in the road brought the water tower and scattered church steeples of Rockcliff into view. On entering, I found it to be a small country town, like dozens of others that I had

passed through. Old rambling houses intermingled with modern ones, some of them very beautiful, and all with wide shaded lawns. That's what I like about small towns—you don't have to cramp yourself. You have plenty of room to get out and stretch, without bumping elbows with someone else. I don't know how it would seem to live in a house with other houses crowded against me on both sides. But born in the mountains as I was, I'm quite sure I wouldn't like it. I prefer little towns like Tutter and Rockcliff—though, as I drew up proudly in my new car and got out, in the business section, I had the feeling that Rockcliff, notwithstanding its many pleasant homes, was just a little bit too small.

There was a block of stores on opposite sides of the leading street, which evidently was a main artery into Madison, twenty miles away. Cars were passing continuously in both directions. This gave the little town more life than the average place of its size. And I noticed a prosperous-looking inn halfway in the block, on the north side. Set back from the street about ten feet, it was particularly noticeable because of an unusually hardy ivy vine which almost completely covered the long front veranda and the two-story building's west side. This extensive vine, with its rank foliage, and the carefully-kept flower beds in front, gave the inn a most pleasing, rest-

ful look. I could imagine that a great many motorists stopped here on their way in and out of the busy capital, preferring the quiet of the small town.

But just then I was more interested in red-hots than I was in public inns. I had to find out, too, where this place was that I was heading for. So I hurried into a meat market to make inquiry, learning that Whispering Towers was the home of a retired sea captain—or a reformed pirate—some people said one thing, the butcher told me, with evident pleasure in the subject, as he weighed up my frankfurters, and some said the other. But all agreed that whether captain or pirate, he had gotten his great fortune secretly from the sea, and that he had come here to hide, as far from the sea and its former associates as possible, very probably to protect what he had.

Once started on the intriguing subject, the talkative butcher wouldn't stop even to wait on his other customers, which convinced me that the peculiar country home, with its high observation towers and fortified stone wall, was the subject of much general talk throughout the countryside.

Captain Max Kegg was the owner's name—a huge barrel-chested blustering man, he was described, with gunpowder eyes and the conventional peg-leg. His amazing household consisted of a one-eyed murderous-looking Portuguese cook, who wore iron rings in his ears, and

a blood-red sash. His only known name was Jans. Then there were two black-skinned south-sea head-hunters who by turns stood guard, in native attire and with native weapons, day and night. Curious people had been known to tiptoe gingerly to the great iron gate to peer at the transplanted savages, but seldom saw them. The countryside felt the natural uneasiness of having two born head-hunters in their midst. Yet in the many years that the aging captain had lived here with his motley household, there had been no loose lifting of heads—or if there was it had been accomplished in bloody secrecy within the fortified walls, and the story never had gotten out.

Concluding the strange household was a mysterious blind Chinese boy of thirteen, Fu Wong Pu, about whose amazing powers of sound detection strange stories had gone out. Also the butcher mentioned an orang-outang—a little pet monkey—belonging to the master.

Eager now to find out who the red-head was that I had been sent here to meet, and why the meeting had been arranged to take place at the fortified castle of the pirate, I got going quickly, with my completed purchases, finding myself very soon in a hilly, wooded section, with winding rutted roads. Finally, in the most isolated spot possible, I caught sight of the three flat-topped parapeted towers from which the unusual place had gotten its name.

The towers rose picturesquely above the tree-tops and surrounding wall, reminding me of pictures I had seen of Windsor castle in England. Secret watch towers, no doubt! As I drew nearer, over the rough unfrequented road, I half expected to see a flash of binocular lenses between the sunny parapets.

But there was no sign of any secret movement there that I could detect from the road. Nor could I see anything through the great front gate when I got there, except trees. The inside drive wound quickly out of sight. It had been planned that way. Plainly old Kegg wanted no curious or unfriendly eyes turned on him in his hide-out.

It was from the many surrounding pine trees, I concluded, that the place got its ghostly name, thus settling that question that Peg had brought up. Whispering Towers! I could well imagine how those needled trees whispered in the night wind. It must be a fearfully eerie place then, I thought, with its ring-eared cook and prowling head-hunters.

Passing the huge gate slowly, and watching sharply for anything that might show itself, I went the length of the high skirting wall and came back, hoping I'd then get a glimpse of the head-hunters. There was still nothing in sight but the shielding trees. Nor could I detect any sounds except the natural cries of the animal and bird life in the deep surrounding forest.

Stopping just beyond the gate, and with a close eye on it, I got together a little pile of twigs and built a fire as instructed. It was exactly three-thirty now—the magic hour, so to speak!—and with the fire going properly I set about to cook the first red-hot for the first red-head who might happen along with ten Indian-head pennies in payment.

And very probably, I told myself, with growing excitement, that would be old Kegg himself. For fiery red hair would fit well with those reputed "gunpowder" eyes of his.

CHAPTER III

THE POISONED MONKEY

My RED-HOTS, so painstakingly prepared over the little fire, went untouched. Contrary to my expectations, no one appeared at the appointed time to claim them. There was no movement of any kind, either within the gate or up and down the lonely road. So at a quarter of four I got ready to leave, figuring that there had been an unintended slip-up of some sort, and that it would be useless for me to wait longer.

What should I do now?—start for home, or go back to Rockcliff and wait for further possible instructions from dad? I hated to leave if I could help him in any way by staying. I was curious, too, from all that had happened and from what I had heard, and I wanted to conclude the unusual adventure if I could. So, after brief deliberation, I decided to return to the village and wait there until something turned up.

Before leaving I took a last curious look through the iron-barred gate, hopeful that old Kegg, or someone, would put in a belated appearance to claim the red-hots that I had ready. But there was still no one in sight. So I stamped out the fire, in true Boy Scout fashion, and prob-

ably would have been off in my car in another moment or two if just then something hadn't suddenly collided with my head.

Gosh! After hearing about those head-hunters, I thought for a minute or two that my own head was gone. I clutched it ridiculously to try and hold it on. But I found, with infinite relief, that I had merely been struck by a harmless pine cone, thrown at me, with perfect aim, from one of the limbs that came out over the wall. When I looked up, there sat the little pet monkey.

But it looked more like a stooped little old man, with its solemn face and brooding eyes, than an animal of the lower sort. I stood spellbound, my heart still thumping from my scare, wondering, as I fought for control of my wits, if this was all a part of the hidden plan, or whether the monkey had just happened along of its own accord.

"Hi!" I spoke finally, with a jerky laugh, as we continued to eye each other. "How are you, Kegg?"

That was the only name I could think of just then.

The little creature had more pine cones in its human-like paws, and it was only by quick ducking that I escaped another crack on the head. Which showed plainly enough that the intelli-

gent animal didn't take kindly to the name I had given it.

It chattered angrily, as it continued the bombardment, telling me in its own shrill language just what it thought of me for my impudence. Then, its mood changing quickly, as it got its eyes on something on the ground, it let itself down, by its long hairy arms, and dropped lightly beside me.

I jumped back, afraid of it. For while the animal scarcely came to my waist, I didn't care to have it attack me. But that was needless alarm on my part. It paid no attention to me. It was pawing gingerly among the extinguished coals, where it recovered a half-burnt frankfurter and began eating it with every evidence of great relish.

But the frankfurter never was finished, for the wise little creature had discovered, though too late to save itself, that there was something wrong with it. And blaming me for its trouble, it came at me like a little fury, spitting and snarling, its eyes ablaze with hatred.

I ran for my car hoping to get away, but the monkey was on me before I could get the door open. To save myself from its teeth and claws, I ran around the car and kept on running around and around, in a way that would have appeared ridiculous to anybody looking on, till finally the monkey fell behind me exhausted.

—I went back guardedly, prepared for renewed flight if necessary. But the monkey was in convulsions now. Its screaming chattering hatred had subsided to a childish begging murmur. It was in deadly pain from the partially eaten frankfurter. And though it had first tried to attack me, as the logical cause of its suffering, it now was begging me piteously for help.

I could do nothing but stare. Then, as I heard approaching excited voices within the wall, I jumped into my car, for my own protection, and started off as fast as I could go.

I was confident that what had just happened never had been planned. And having been the indirect cause of the monkey's death—for it plainly was dying of poisoning of some sort—I had no desire just then to face the probably furious owner.

I watched in the mirror as I sped off. Just before the entrance disappeared from view I saw a little Chinese boy run out. Fu Wong Pu! He couldn't see me, with his blind eyes, but he could hear me, for he looked after me. Then I saw him turn and bend over the monkey. At the same instant other fast-moving figures came from the gate. My glimpse of them was so momentary that I couldn't distinguish them, but I concluded it was probably the alarmed head-hunters.

My poor little car suffered on the return trip, for I raced on at break-neck speed, regardless of

the bumps. My own head seemed vastly more important to me than car springs. I kept listening for sounds of pursuit too. But I got safely away. Back in Rockcliff, I drew up at the curb and sat in the car for a moment to collect my wits.

If the monkey *had* been poisoned, as I still believed, then of course the poison had been intended for me, and the guilt was the talkative butcher's.

But why should he try to poison *me*? So far as I knew he never had heard of me before. There had been nothing unfriendly or scheming in his actions.

I hadn't noticed till then that I had stopped directly in front of a small one-story doctor's office. It suddenly occurred to me that it might be a good plan for me to get the doctor's opinion of the poisoning before involving the butcher in any complaints. So I took some of the frankfurters and went in.

"Well, how's everything down in the sucker state?" the doctor inquired genially, in a somewhat deep bass voice, when we were alone in his consulting room.

He was a tall, well-dressed, earnest-mannered man.

"How did you know I came from the sucker state?" I asked in turn.

"I saw your Illinois license plate, of course.

Nice little car you have too. Is it your own?"

"Yes, sir," I nodded, thinking to myself that he was a great deal more observing than most men. I was to learn that that was a trait of his.

"My father gave me the car for my birthday," I added, with pride.

"Sixteen?"

"Yes, sir—to-day."

"I put you down for sixteen, when I saw you in the meat market a while back. But let me give you a tip, my boy—when you're in a small town like this don't attach too much importance to the stories you hear. There's entirely too much aimless talking going on in towns like ours. Nine-tenths of that account of the butcher's was just hearsay. We have no proof that old Kegg is a retired pirate, or that he's hiding an ill-gotten fortune out there. He may be just a queer type, rich enough to satisfy his whims and wanting people like that around him. But what can I do for you, my lad? You look worried."

"I am," I told him truthfully.

"I can't imagine what a healthy boy like you could have to worry about. But tell me about it and I'll see if I can help you."

"It's those frankfurters I bought this afternoon. I think they had poison in them. A monkey had convulsions from eating one."

"A monkey? Where?"

"At Whispering Towers."

"But what were you doing out there?" he looked at me curiously.

"I was sent there to meet a red-head. And I was told to take a dozen frankfurters and buns along."

"Meet a red-head? What do you mean?—some red-headed boy?"

"Yes—or a girl. But I didn't see a soul till I was getting away. Then a little Chinese boy came out, and after him some others. I think it was the two head-hunters, but I'm not sure."

"How did the monkey get the poison? Were you feeding it?"

"No. It found one of the frankfurters and ate it. And almost immediately it began to froth at the mouth. It beat its stomach too."

"Was it dead when you left?"

"No, but I think it was dying."

"I wonder if Foster got a call on that," the doctor spoke reflectively.

"Who?" I asked.

"Just a minute."

Reaching for the phone on his desk he gave a number from memory.

"Is that you, Mrs. Foster?" he inquired presently. "Say, did Doc just get a call from Whispering Towers? . . . He did, eh? . . . Well, I'd like to talk with him about that case when he gets back. Please ask him to call me. Yes, Arnoldson. Good-by."

The call concluded, the doctor turned to me gravely.

"Evidently there's more to this poisoning than I first suspected. That was the wife of our local veterinarian—Dr. Foster—and she says he's just been called to the Towers to treat a poisoned monkey. If you have one of those frankfurters I'd like to see it."

I watched then, breathless, as he took the frankfurters and examined them one by one, smelling them first and then gingerly tasting one.

But he didn't swallow the morsel. Instead, as he was warned by some dangerous taste, he spit violently to clear his mouth, following with a hastily procured mouth wash.

Next, cutting into one of the frankfurters, he showed me traces of an injected white powder.

"Are you familiar with poisons?" he asked shortly.

"No, sir," I shook my head.

"Well, there's enough poison there to kill a dozen men."

"What is it?" I asked weakly.

"Strychnine."

CHAPTER IV

TRACING THE POISON

I THOUGHT the doctor would call the police now and have the butcher arrested. Instead he began pacing the small room with a troubled air.

I stood it as long as I could.

"But why don't you call the police?" I spoke nervously. "That butcher must be crazy to sell me meat like that. If you don't stop him he'll poison the whole town."

"I'm trying to figure out how those frankfurters could have gotten into your hands after you left the meat market," the doctor puzzled.

"They never got into my hands after I left the meat market," I declared. "I got them *in* the market—from that butcher. I think you ought to report him."

"I'd be willing to gamble the last dollar I have that there isn't the slightest trace of poison of any sort in that meat market," the doctor spoke gravely. "As for the butcher being crazy—nonsense! I've known Sam Gardner all my life. We've grown up here together. Except for the fact that he talks too much—and you had a good example of that this afternoon—Sam's a fine, upright man. You couldn't convince me in a month

of Sundays that he had anything to do with that poisoning. But I tell you what I'll do—I'll get him over here and question him."

The butcher came in laughing.

"What's the matter, Dr. Arnoldson?" he chuckled. "Do you want me to hold some patient of yours while you saw his leg off?"

"I've got a complaint against you, Sam," the doctor spoke gravely.

"A complaint?" the butcher repeated, sobering. "You mean—about my meat?"

"Yes. . . . You remember this boy, don't you?"

"Sure. But if he's kicking on those frankfurters—"

"Well, try one of them and see if you can tell us what gives them such a queer taste."

I watched, horrified, as the butcher took one of the frankfurters and raised it unhesitatingly to his mouth. He was stopped just in time.

"Well, my boy," the doctor turned to me, "are you convinced of his innocence now?"

"Yes," I spoke weakly.

The butcher's anxious eyes still wandered between us.

"What's the matter, Doc?" he asked.

"The matter is, Sam, that this boy has just escaped poisoning by a miracle. Those frankfurters are saturated with strychnine."

"Strychnine? No!" the words were spoken in a horrified gasp.

"He thought you poisoned them, Sam—that you tried to kill him—so he brought them to me for analysis. That's why I called you in to test you—not that I had the slightest belief in your guilt myself. But I wanted to prove your innocence to him."

"Who is he?" the butcher then asked, glowering at me.

"A boy from Illinois. He hasn't told me his name yet, though I notice that he has the monogram P-O on his shirt."

"What are you trying to do?" the butcher then went at me angrily. "Are you trying to get me into trouble? Those frankfurters weren't poisoned when I sold them to you."

"Of course not," the doctor interceded placatingly. "I realized that from the start. And he realizes it now. So don't get excited, Sam. No one is trying to get you into trouble. On the contrary we're trying to keep you out of trouble. For consider where you'd be now if the attempted poisoning had succeeded."

The butcher sat down, sweating.

"I hope this doesn't get out, Doc," he spoke gruffly. "It will hurt my business."

"But what can you tell us that will help us get to the bottom of the matter, Sam?"

"I only know that the frankfurters weren't

poisoned when I sold them to this boy. If he didn't exchange packages with someone he must have poisoned them himself."

"He wouldn't be likely to do that," the doctor spoke dryly, "and then come here to have them analyzed. It's more probable that someone switched packages with him. As a first step, suppose you tell us, if you can, who else bought a similar amount of frankfurters from you to-day."

"Mrs. Holcomb and the Swenson boy bought some for dinner—but each bought a pound. This boy bought only a dozen."

"Then your frankfurters weigh more or less to the pound—is that it?"

"More. About sixteen. But I remember now," the butcher continued excitedly, "there was a man—a strange man—who asked for another dozen frankfurters, just like this boy—and right after he left too."

"A man of about your own build, wasn't it, Sam?—thick-set, and rather untidy in his appearance?"

"Yes," came the excited cry. "That's the man. And you were there too—I remember now."

"I didn't stay to hear the man give you his order," the doctor resumed. "But I noticed him, and his generally unpleasant appearance, when you were talking about the Towers. I thought at the time he was giving you closer than ordinary

attention. So he too ordered a dozen frankfurters, eh?"

"Yes," the butcher nodded.

"Well, there's our man," the doctor spoke quickly, "if we can catch him. Black trousers—baggy at the knees—I think he must be out of work, or a plain tramp—might have worked in a garage, for his brown plaid coat had several big grease spots on it. His gray felt hat was greasy too, and the hat band was stained from perspiration. So evidently he's been doing some work, or a lot of walking in the hot sun."

"And you remembered all that?" I asked, amazed.

"I have a perfect picture of the man in my mind," was the unassuming reply, "clear down to his shoes and shabby necktie. I keep such mental images of people I meet, particularly strangers. That's why I remembered you so well."

He turned to the butcher.

"Can you tell us anything more about the stranger, Sam?"

"No. He just paid for the meat and went out."

"He didn't say anything or do anything that you can recall now, that might have some bearing on the mystery?"

"No."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose you're anxious to get back to your shop, so we'll excuse you if you wish. But if I were you I'd keep still about this, till we learn more about it. Watch closely for that man—you may see him again. If so, phone me. And, Sam—"

"Yes?"

"Don't let any strangers handle your meat."

"I won't, Doc."

With that the butcher went off troubled.

"And now," the doctor turned to me, "let us find out if we can how the poisoned frankfurters got into your hands. You went where after leaving the meat market?"

"To a grocery store next door."

"Yes, I know the place. Did you lay your meat package down there?"

"No. I had it in my hands all the time."

"Very well, the substitution didn't occur there, and I hardly expected it. He didn't have time to get his own frankfurters, poison them—he did that, I think, by puncturing the skins with a match and crowding the poison in—and overtake you. Where was your next stop?"

"In a bakery, at the other end of the block."

"And there you *did* lay your meat package on the counter while you got the money for your buns. Isn't that true?"

"No," I firmly shook my head. "I had the package under my arm."

"But the substitution *must* have occurred there or in the grocery store—unless you picked the man up on your way to the Towers."

I was completely bewildered now. But I declared again, with certainty, that the meat package hadn't left my hands a single second, either in the grocery or bakery. Nor had I taken anyone into my car.

"And you're sure," the doctor persisted, "that you didn't first put your meat package in the car and then go to the other stores?"

"No, I had it with me," I declared.

"Did you notice the man in the meat market?"

"No. I was too interested in the butcher's story, I guess. In fact, I didn't notice you either."

"Well, the man certainly had his eyes on you."

"But why should he want to poison me?" I cried, bewildered.

The doctor smiled blandly.

"By the way," says he, his eyes returning to my monogram, "you haven't told me yet what the P-O stands for? Possibly you should, in case something drastic does happen to you before you get away from here."

"My name is Poppy Ott," I told him frankly.

"Poppy?" he repeated the name, with a smile. "That's an odd name, for a boy. But I rather like the sound of it."

"I used to peddle pop-corn for spending

money," I explained, "and the kids started calling me Poppy."

"Oh, *that* kind of a pop-pop, huh? I see. And now, Poppy, let's go down the street and see if we can find out a little more about this poisoning, and possibly how the frankfurters got into your hands."

With that he got his hat and went out, motioning for me to follow him, which I did wonderingly.

Stopping at the dark entryway of an overhead office of some sort, he stepped in and with a flashlight began searching the floor by inches, from the doorway back to the stairs. Then he started up the stairs, going over the first two steps, and stopping exultantly on the third.

"Here you are," said he, his search completed.

When I bent down, with him holding the light, I saw traces of the same white powder that we had found in the frankfurters.

CHAPTER V

DORY TROT

"WHAT made you suspect that the frankfurters had been poisoned here?" I asked Dr. Arnoldson, as we came out of the entryway.

"Well, figure it out for yourself, Poppy. We're satisfied that the poisoner followed you out of the meat market with a dozen frankfurters of his own. Before getting them into your hands he had to inject the poison. Naturally he couldn't have done this openly in the street. Having lived here all my life, I know each crook and turn of the little town like an open book. And instantly, as I searched my mind for a place where the poisoner could have stepped in quickly, out of sight, I struck on this public entryway. It was right on his way to the bakery, where he overtook you. The evidence proves that my surmise was correct."

"You should have been a detective," I told him admiringly, "instead of a doctor."

"As a matter of fact," he confided, "I always wanted to be a detective. I have a brother-in-law who's one—Harrison Trot. Maybe you've heard of him, he lives in Madison, where he conducts a private agency."

"No," I shook my head, "I don't recall that I ever heard the name before."

"Harrison came from the south. I was a small boy of ten when he began paying serious attention to my older sister. He was just starting his career then and I recall how thrilled I was by his brief accounts of criminals and their ways. He even took me out on a few of his early cases. It was through watching his methods that I learned how very much could be accomplished in such work through close observation and logical deduction. It was then that I fixed my mind on a detective career. But, alas!—my good old dad had other plans for me. Medicine, to him, was the most worthy of all professions, and he was particularly insistent that I follow in his footsteps. He finished a grand life, Poppy. My heritage from him, in public trust and confidence, has been almost overwhelming at times. Probably I"ll always be here to administer to the public's pains, exactly as he wished. But the old longing has never been wholly subdued, hence my delight when something like this turns up. A mystery gives me a chance to exercise my wits. Some of my happiest moments are spent with my brother-in-law, in going over his more peculiar cases. I wish you could meet him, Poppy. He'd be a revelation to you. By the way, you most certainly ought to meet that young son of his too—Dory. There's a boy for you!"

"Is he a detective too?" I asked, peculiarly interested.

"Dory?" and the doctor laughed pleasantly. "No, I don't think he'll ever be a detective, though his father would naturally like to have it that way. To tell you the truth we haven't found out yet what Dory really does want to do, outside of having a good time. I think he'd like to fly, but all boys want to do that. And he falls hard for a pretty face, though he's anything but pretty himself. He's just a big, jolly, aimless, happy-go-lucky boy, with the kind of eyes you like to see in a boy—unafraid of anything in the world, I believe—and with the reddest head of hair that you ever saw in all your born days."

I caught my breath.

"Do you suppose—" I began excitedly.

"That he's your red-head?" the doctor picked up my thought, with a quizzical air. "Well, he certainly fills the bill. But I fail to see what possible connection there could be between you two boys."

"Except that his father came from the south," I spoke thoughtfully.

"Yes, from Tennessee, I think—around Nashville some place."

"That's where I came from too."

The doctor still felt that the meat package had been switched in the bakery, so he started toward it, to question the clerk, but stopped and

waited, when a somewhat fleshy woman, almost running, called his name.

"Oh, Dr. Karl! Just a moment, please."

"Yes, Mrs. Foster?" he inquired quickly, as the woman came up breathless. "What is it? Some message from your husband?"

"Yes, he tried to phone you at your office but couldn't get you," the woman panted excitedly. "He asked me to try and find you. It's something he needs for that poisoned monkey."

"Sodium amytal?"

"I wrote it down—on this paper."

The doctor glanced quickly at the paper and passed it on to me.

"I'll take it out to him right away, Mrs. Foster," he promised briskly.

"Oh, but I don't want to bother you that much, Dr. Karl. I can get someone else with a car."

"It's no bother at all, Mrs. Foster. . . . Care to go along, Poppy?"

"Yes," I laughed nervously, "if you'll take your own car. But I don't want to go back there so soon with my own car. It's too noticeable."

"All right then," he spoke briskly, "let's get going."

We were soon off over the same bumpy winding roads in a large easy-riding car.

"What's sodium amytal?" I asked, as we sped along.

"Science's latest contribution to the treatment

of strychnine poisoning. Foster and I were talking about it just this morning. That's why he phoned me."

I kept watching ahead for the three towers

"Do you think they'll let us in when we get there?" I asked.

"I'm wondering about that myself. Few people do get in, doctors included."

"Then you've never been there yourself?" I asked curiously.

"No. But I'll confess I've often wanted to. There's no doubt that old Kegg is a queer character, though, as I told you in the office, I've always felt that the stories about him and his queer guards were greatly exaggerated. I've often had the feeling too that he encouraged this exaggeration—else why should he maintain such an ill-assorted household? It looks to me as though he wants to create talk."

"I'll be kind of scared to go in myself, even if I get the chance," I spoke nervously. "If he had a telescope trained on me from one of those watch towers, or had a secret peep-hole in the wall, it might not be so healthy for me."

Here a boy beside the road thumbed us for a ride.

"Why, Dory Trot!" cried the amazed doctor, as he slammed on the brakes and stopped in a cloud of dust. "What in the world are you doing here?"

The red-headed boy from Madison!

"Hi, Uncle Karl!" the boy cried happily. "How about a ride? Or maybe you don't pick up hitch-hikers, huh?"

The shrewd doctor then glanced between us.

"Poppy," said he, with both amusement and bewilderment in his eyes, "I think this is your red-head all right."

"It must be," I said, staring bewilderedly at the grinning boy.

A detective's son!—red-headed!—plainly on his way to the Towers!—and our fathers both came from Tennessee! This, coupled with my own dad's known detective ambitions, left little doubt in my mind.

The boy got in, with a curious look at me, and we hurried on.

"Where are you heading for, Uncle Karl?—Whispering Towers?"

"Yes," the driver spoke shortly, with his eyes on the difficult road.

"Whoopee!" came the boyish outburst. "That's where I'm going too."

"And how's your mother?"

"Oh, she's o-k. But do you know, Uncle Karl, I think dad's got a bad case of bats in his belfry —from what just happened."

"Which is exactly what I thought about my own dad," I put in quietly.

The boy quickly grasped my meaning.

"Say!" he cried excitedly. "Are you going there too? And are you the guy with the red-hots?"

"I *was* the guy with the red-hots," I corrected.

The doctor shivered as his thoughts ran ahead of us.

"Good heavens!" he cried, horrified. "You might both have been poisoned. What heinous plot is afoot here anyway?"

The boy looked first at his uncle and then at me.

"That kind of hit my head and bounced off into space, Uncle Karl. What did you mean anyway?"

As the doctor had described him, he was a big boy, almost overgrown, with an air of perfect health and unrestricted jollity. I could imagine him always in the lead in whatever enterprises he and his friends elected to pursue—fun, sports, deviltry and everything else. I took an instant liking to him, though I scarcely realized then how closely our futures were to be woven together.

Introductions and explanations followed as we drove along. And just as I had surmised, he too had been sent mysteriously to the Whispering Towers gate by his father. This showed that whatever the mystery or difficulty was, it had some bearing on the two men's earlier life.

"Just what were your father's detailed instruc-

tions anyway, Dory?" the puzzled doctor asked, as the conversation continued.

"Why, he told me to go there, with some Indian-head pennies, and buy some red-hots. When I asked him if there was a red-hot stand there, and why he wanted me to go *there* and buy them, he said I'd find out."

"But what delayed you?"

"Oh," the boy grinned, "some crazy friends of mine said they'd bring me out in their car. They took me almost to Milwaukee—the bums!—and I had to hitch-hike back."

"Thank heaven!" the doctor spoke fervently. "Providence certainly has been watching over you two boys to-day."

"What was that you said about some poison, Uncle Karl?" the boy quizzed.

The doctor, looking serious, told him.

"You were saved by your friends, Dory. And Poppy was saved by a monkey."

"Do you suppose," the boy spoke slowly, "that dad knew that anything like that was going to happen?—I mean about the poison?"

"Heavens—no!" cried the perturbed doctor. "He certainly would not have subjected you to any such danger as that. It's unthinkable. Some revengeful enemy of his, and Poppy's father's, has tried to kill you both, I think."

"What did you say your name is?" Dory asked me quizzically.

"Poppy Ott."

"Ott, huh?" he studied over the name. "I've heard dad mention that name. Don't you live down in Illinois somewhere?"

"Yes—in Tutter."

"Sure!—that's the place. And your dad makes stilts."

"Evidently," the doctor supplied here, "your dads are old friends. But I can't comprehend their purpose in bringing you two together in such an outlandish way as this, telling one to come here and cook red-hots and the other to come and buy them. Can't you think of any answer to the riddle at all, Dory?—in anything your father told you?"

"No. That's why I said the woodpeckers are working on him."

"My own dad," I explained, "went away this morning before I got up."

"Went away where?" the doctor asked quickly.

"I don't know. He didn't tell me. But he left me a letter telling me what to do."

"May I see that letter, Poppy, when we get back to the office?"

"You most certainly can," I told him, thankful that I had a man of his capacities to help me. "I've got another paper too—a cipher."

"Yah," Dory spoke characteristically, as he began to dig into his pockets, "you and me both. And we were going to match them, weren't we?"

Here is his half of the cipher:

ok
n
he
dow
f
e
eys
w
t
gh
on

Now, to clear up the mystery, all we had to do was to hurry back to my locked car, where I had my own half of the cipher safely put away in my traveling bag.

CHAPTER VI

THE MONKEY'S PAW

I WAS as eager as Dr. Arnoldson to see the inside of the unusual castle. But we were given no chance to satisfy our curiosity that day, for just as we arrived at the gate we met Dr. Foster coming out in his car.

The monkey, he told us shortly, was dead.

I hoped this time I'd sight somebody through the gate, particularly the head-hunters. I watched closely as we turned around to go back, but whoever had let the veterinarian out had disappeared quickly.

The afternoon was well gone now. So upon our return to town it was agreed that I should engage a room at the village inn and then meet Dory and his uncle in the latter's office at seven-thirty.

"We ought to clear up the mystery in a hurry," Dr. Arnoldson commented with pleasant anticipation, as he dropped me near my own parked car, "when we get your half of the cipher. So don't forget it, Poppy, nor that letter of your father's either."

"I won't," I promised.

After moving my car to a regular parking place

in back of the inn, I went in with my bag and registered, the short dumpy innkeeper showing me to a room on the second floor.

It was a west room, with two windows, screened and neatly curtained, through which the declining summer sun now shone in hotly.

The innkeeper seemed to read my thoughts as I stopped momentarily at the windows.

"It will be much cooler, sir, when the sun goes down. Really, we feel that our sleeping rooms are very comfortable. And there will be nothing else?" he concluded politely.

Thanking him, and tidying up, I started out for a brisk walk before dinner.

"Hi, Poppy!" a familiar clamorous voice called, as I passed the little town's only drug store. "Come on in and meet the baby."

It was Dory! And the "baby" referred to was a girl of about his own age who sat bright-eyed beside him at the soda counter.

"Kak," he introduced with a big air, when I joined them, "meet the governor of Illinois—Mr. Pansy Ott."

Mr. Pansy Ott!

"It's Poppy Ott," I corrected, reddening, as the girl fastened her laughing eyes on me. "And it isn't the flowery kind of a Poppy at all—but the pop-corn kind."

"I see," she then spoke merrily in turn, "that I'll have to introduce myself. Dory never did

have any manners. I'm Catherine Gates—Kak to him. I'm very glad to meet you, Poppy."

She wasn't a particularly pretty girl. She even had a few scattered freckles, to match Dory's. But there was something lively and jolly about her. She had his same happy-go-lucky bantering air. So I didn't wonder long at the friendship between them.

"It's always a big day for me," she told me, "when Dory dear comes to town, for he buys me malted milks."

"Yes, but I'm going to quit it," Dory growled, "for you're getting too fat. Don't you think she's too fat, Pansy?"

I felt like giving him a kick. He just said that to embarrass me.

"I wish you'd cut out that Pansy stuff," I told him.

"Oh, but I just adore pansies," laughed the girl, her eyes livelier than ever.

Dory put on a fierce proprietary air.

"Look here, gal!" he spoke roughly, jerking her arm. "Are you trying to make an infernal triangle out of this? And you, Tutter!—just remember that Columbus and I discovered her first. Besides, we're related—aren't we, overweight?"

"Oh, sure," the girl laughed. "My pet cat sleeps on your uncle's back porch. That makes us thirty-second cousins at least."

"Kak happens to be the youngest of four sis-

ters," Dory then told me, with more sense. "The others are good-looking."

"Yes, but I never wanted to be good-looking myself," the girl shrugged indifferently. "I always wanted to be fat and ugly, so I could be an old maid and keep a parrot. But maybe," she glanced archly at me from the corner of her eye, "Poppy here will take pity on me. You know, I *can* bake perfectly wonderful biscuits. Can't I, Dory?"

He clutched one cheek painfully.

"Ugh!" he grimaced.

"You see," she turned to me brightly. "He's part Indian, and that's his way of saying yes when he's pleased. And did you ever see anybody who could pick out more unsuitable neckties? *Him* with a red necktie! But I can stand even that for a malted milk."

She was a swell girl all right—the kind that any sensible fellow could have a lot of fun with. I enjoyed meeting her immensely.

Upon my return to the inn, for dinner, I found the landlord and another man putting up a sign that had blown down the previous night.

The Green Monkey!

Well, I concluded, as I went on in, this probably had nothing to do with the poisoned monkey. But it did strike me as an odd coincidence. And what a ridiculous name for such a quiet-appearing place! But the alert proprietor, I suppose, had

adopted that particular name to get the attention of the passing motorists.

A radio in the office kept me entertained after a very pleasant and satisfying dinner. Then, noticing the time, I dashed upstairs to get the letter and cipher out of my grip.

To my amazement the cipher wasn't there!

Dr. Arnoldson's face fell when I appeared at his office at the appointed time without my expected half of the cipher.

"But what became of it?" he asked anxiously. "Surely you haven't lost it."

"To tell you the truth," I spoke, chagrined by my stupidity, "I think I came off and forgot it. I remember now—the two papers lay together. In my hurry to get away I guess I grabbed only one. But if necessary I can call up one of my chums and have him read it to us."

"Well, we won't do that yet. We may get all we need from Dory's half."

"That's a nice girl you had in the drug store," I told Dory, as we waited for his uncle to conclude his study of the cipher. "But the next time you call me Pansy in front of a strange girl, I'm going to crack you one."

He laughed.

"Kak *is* a swell kid," he agreed. "If you're going to be around here very long you want to get better acquainted with her, Poppy."

"Well, that might be a good plan at that," I

joked. "For I imagine she *would* like to know a real guy."

"Says you!" he snorted in my face.

"Says me!" I snorted back.

Dr. Arnoldson spoke to us then.

"It looks to me," he gave his earnest opinion of the cipher, "as though a number of words had been written one on top of another instead of in a line as usual, and then the paper halved in the middle. This evidently is the right half."

"Yes," I put in, "mine was just the opposite—I can remember that."

"Well, I certainly wish you had it, Poppy," his disappointment returned. "We'd know then what you and Dory were sent here for, and what was expected of you."

"I can see two complete words in mine," Dory spoke, with his eyes on the paper. "There's 'he' and 'on.' Did you notice that, Uncle Karl?"

"Yes, but I doubt if they are complete words, Dory. More probably they're halves of longer words. For instance, what you think is 'on' may be the last syllable of 'upon.'"

Dory turned to me sourly.

"Poppy, you're an egg to go off and forget your paper that away. Are all the boys down in Illinois that dumb?"

"Well," I came back at him promptly, "I got to the Towers on time anyway."

"Ouch!" he grimaced.

"Can't you remember anything from your half that will help us, Poppy?" Dr. Arnoldson asked me.

"There were two words I remember—'monk' and 'pa.' My chums kidded me about it, telling me that some monk was going to marry me to a red-headed widow, and that my pa favored it."

"Monk?" the doctor spoke quickly, as he ran his eyes up and down the halved words. "Why, that makes 'monkeys' here. Don't you see, boys? M-o-n-k on yours, Poppy, and e-y-s here on Dory's."

"And instead of 'pa,'" I cried excitedly, pointing to the next word, "it's 'paw.' Something about a 'monkey's paw.'"

Here's how the cipher looked to us now:

ok
n
he
dow
f
e
monkeys
paw
t
gh
on

"A monkey's paw!" the doctor repeated, dumfounded. "Why, this is getting more bewilder-

ing every minute. I never dreamed that the poisoned monkey would be involved. Yet it would seem so now. The monkey's paw! Do you suppose, Poppy, it had something in its paws for you when it appeared in the tree?"

"It had some pine cones," I laughed, as I remembered my fright at its first crack.

"But you saw nothing else?"

"No," I shook my head.

"Well, it certainly is beyond me," the doctor spoke helplessly. "And I still can't make myself believe that the poisoning was intended by your fathers. That was too grave a risk for you boys. Evidently it was mainly on the monkey's account that you were sent there separately to meet each other. And now the monkey's dead!"

"I wish I could see it for a minute or two," Dory put in, his usual banter gone as his interest in the puzzling case deepened.

"Let's call up old Kegg," I suggested daringly, "and tell him we've got to hold an inquest."

"Sure thing," Dory endorsed the suggestion. "Then we can find out if there's anything funny about its paws. I think it's more likely to be a mark of some kind than something it carried. Can't we demand an inquest, Uncle Karl?" the matter was put eagerly to the doctor.

"A more sensible plan I think," he growled, with an annoyed air, "would be to phone your father and ask what he means by all this mystery.

I'm beginning to think it's just a foolish tangle that might have ended tragically. It certainly gives me a new insight into Harrison Trot."

Dory went promptly to the phone and put in a call to Madison.

"Is that you, Sweden?" he inquired, when the connection was completed.

"The maid?" Dr. Arnoldson asked, smiling.

Dory nodded.

"Well, listen here, yumpin' yimminy—suppose you yump over a couple of chairs, into dad's study, and tell him that the family nest egg wants to converse with him on private wire number twenty-six. And when I come home I'll let you bake a pie for me. . . . What's that? . . . No yumpy, huh? . . . Well, just yumpy upstairs then and get mother. . . . *What?* . . . They did?"

"What's the matter, Dory?" the doctor asked quickly.

"She says they yust went away," Dory spoke wonderingly.

"Went away where?"

"Where was it, Hulda?—Paris or Oshkosh? . . . But didn't they tell you when they'd be back, or anything? . . . Well, that's blamed queer."

At the conclusion of the phone conversation we were right where we had started, except that we knew now that the mysterious cipher dealt in part with a "monkey's paw."

Like my own dad, Dory's parents, after start-

ing him for Rockcliff, had hurried off themselves, leaving no address behind them, or any word of explanation. The maid said they were excited, and that they went away very hurriedly. But that's all she could tell.

Dr. Arnoldson then gravely read my letter.

"Well, I don't know about your father," he told me at length, "but I can't picture Harrison Trot running away from danger of any sort, particularly if it concerned a member of his family. It's beyond my comprehension—that poisoning and everything. In order to get started on the matter as quickly as we can, Poppy, I suggest that you call up your chum as you mentioned. Certainly it ought to help, to get your complete half of the cipher.

I immediately put in a call for Jerry. Telling him what I wanted and where I was, I asked him to call me back. But his return call was as disappointing as all the rest. He could find no trace of the cipher, he said. If I hadn't it with me now I probably had lost it.

There the matter stood when I went back to the inn for the night, where tragedy unsuspected by any of us lurked grimly.

CHAPTER VII

THE ACTOR'S FATE

DARKNESS had gathered. The lights in the streets, and particularly in the inn, glowed cheerfully.

A small show troupe had just registered for the night, and when I went up to my room, I found the dumpy little innkeeper arguing with one of the actors, an elderly bearded dapperish little man, over the room assigned to him.

In laying out his rooms the shrewd innkeeper had purposely omitted number thirteen, out of respect for the traveling public's superstitions. But the actor, it seems, was so thoroughly saturated with the superstitions of his profession that he refused even to sleep in number fourteen, contending vehemently that it really was room thirteen trickly misnumbered.

I had room twelve myself. As the two men were almost in front of my own door, I either had to crowd around them or wait for the argument to subside. So I decided to wait, wondering, as I took note of the actor's extravagant gestures, where I had seen him before. There was something vaguely familiar about him.

I finally settled the silly argument by agreeing

to change rooms with the actor, for I had no fear of mere numbers myself. So the transfer was made, with the relieved little innkeeper bobbing excitedly about to make everybody comfortable. And thinking that Dory might put in a call for me to the wrong room—for he had asked me my number—I called him up at his uncle's residence.

But I got Kak instead.

"Oh, is that you, Poppy? . . . No, Dory isn't here just now. I stopped in to tell him his bedtime story, but it seems he's got some kind of important monkey business on hand."

"Monkey business?" I spoke quickly.

"Just a minute!—here he comes now. I'll let him tell you."

"There was a jumble of voices at the other end. Then Dory's lusty voice took precedence.

"That you, Poppy?" he asked excitedly.

"Yes—what's the matter now?"

"Well, just after Uncle Karl and I got home, Dr. Foster came running in, asking us wild-eyed if we had seen anything of his monkey."

"*His* monkey?" I spoke wonderingly.

"Well, you know—the one you poisoned."

"I didn't poison it," I corrected quickly, not wanting to carry the guilt.

"Well, you know what I mean. Foster's a taxidermist too and he brought the monkey home to mount. He has a little shop in his back yard.

When he went out there, a short time ago, the monkey was gone. The door was open too. Now he's wondering if the monkey came to life and walked out of its own accord, or if it was stolen."

I stood there bewildered.

"Aren't we ever going to hear the last of that monkey?" I cried.

"I'm afraid not, Poppy—till we know the truth about its paws."

"Have you and your uncle been down there?" I followed up.

"Yes."

"What does he think about it?" I asked quickly.

"He isn't trying to think. He says he's going to bed to give his brain a rest."

"But what does Dr. Foster think?" I persisted. "That the monkey really came to life?"

"Of course not—stupid! Someone stole it."

"But why should anybody steal a dead monkey?"

"Sh-h-h!" he hissed into the phone. "I have a theory."

"What?" I asked, breathless.

"That Kak came over here purposely to make me walk home with her in the moonlight. So here's where the suffering begins. Good-night, lonesome."

I left the phone dizzily. Monkeys, monkeys, monkeys! It might well be teeming Africa, I

told myself with an uneasy laugh, instead of placid Wisconsin.

First Dory and I had been given the halves of a mysterious cipher containing reference to a "monkey's paw." Then I had strangely contacted a little monkey, out of as unusual a place as one could expect to find anywhere—a fortified modern castle built presumably for the protection of a one-legged pirate guarded by native head-hunters and served by a ring-eared cook. Added to this was the misnamed inn, and now the report that the carcass of the poisoned monkey had been stolen. Certainly, a strange chain of "monkey business," as Kak had so nonsensically stated.

What could be its meaning?—if it had a comprehensible meaning—and where would it lead? Dad, with a part in it, was gone. But where? Dory's parents, also concerned, were gone. Where? Jerry had told me that dad had appeared troubled. His letter had been signed that way too—"your troubled father." And the Madison maid had said that Dory's parents had left troubled, apparently almost flying from town the minute he was gone.

Of one thing I was certain—however much had gone awry up to this point, it was perfectly obvious that a scheme had been in progress for some time, between our parents, to bring Dory

and me together. But to what purpose and for what ends? There was the riddle.

I could hear the bantamish actor in his room, pacing and mumbling, probably the lines of some play. Again I wondered, vaguely uneasy, where I had seen him or someone like him. His colleagues came in presently with some friendly banter, their voices soon sinking earnestly. Whatever they were talking about so secretly seemed at times to excite them exceedingly. After that the actor went out. Finding my own room still too hot for comfortable sleeping I went out too, walking up one side of the almost deserted business street and down the other.

In a little restaurant I caught a glimpse of the actor at the counter with a large red-hot in his hands and another awaiting consumption on a plate beside him. Right there was an important clew had I been nimble-witted enough to grasp it. But at the time it meant nothing to me.

At eleven o'clock I was in bed, with the lights out, and sound asleep. Both windows were open. A penetrating sound at two o'clock brought me sitting up, my heart pounding.

A faded sluggish moon had picked up the duties of the street lights when the latter had been turned out at what the village fathers felt was a proper hour for all decent citizens to be in bed. By this faint ghostly light I now detected an imp-

ish goblin-like face peering in at me over the window sill.

It was the little monkey!

For possibly ten seconds it hung there with its scraping paws, grinning at me hideously, seemingly realizing the horrifying fear that it had aroused in me, and amused by it. Then, with a final malevolent enigmatical grin, it dropped silently from sight.

Dr. Foster had pronounced the monkey dead. He had brought the supposed carcass home to mount it. Then the carcass had disappeared. Now I faced the added dumfounding fact that either the monkey wasn't dead, as had been thought, or there was another one around exactly like it.

After what had gone before, the fact that a monkey of any sort had been there, at that unearthly hour, and had selected my particular window for its hideous demonstration, literally terrified me.

Nor was it a pleasant thought either that I might have been looking at a specter—or, if you please, to use more simple words, the ghost of a monkey whose death I had so inadvertently brought about.

I had always ridiculed the silly idea of ghosts. I was even less inclined to believe that an animal of the lower sort could appear in ghostly guise. But the fact remained that I *had* seen something

at the window—either a specter, the living poisoned monkey, or its exact twin.

Drawn guardedly to the window, where a screen had been quietly removed while I slept, I looked out and down, jumping back, with a stifled cry, when one of the dangling snakelike tendrils of the ivy vine swung into my face. That whole side of the building was covered by the roving vine, which explained how the monkey had been able to climb up and down.

The removed screen gave a new aspect to the mystery. Maybe the monkey—whatever its identity—had actually been in the room. Maybe it was a trained monkey, who thus robbed people in their sleep.

I ran back then, expecting to find my pockets turned inside out. But nothing had been disturbed. The monkey, it seems, if it had been in the room, had just come and gone, to some unknown whim or purpose of its own.

I went back to the window to see if the monkey was still about. There was no sign of it below, though I could detect the fallen screen which evidently had been secured with door buttons from without.

But what was that!—there were two screens on the ground! And my other screen was intact. I leaned out then for a look on both sides, thus discovering that one of the actor's screens was out, like mine.

Could it be possible, I asked myself excitedly, that the monkey, instead of going down as I had surmised, had gone into the adjoining room and was still there?

I decided to watch and see. And I intended, when it appeared, to go daringly down the vine myself in close pursuit, to thus establish its ownership in case it should turn out to be a twin and not the poisoned monkey or a specter.

I brought my clothes to the window, where I could watch while I dressed. There I waited for fully ten minutes. But there was no sound, either through the partition or on the other window sill.

My attention here was drawn from the window to the door of my room by stealthy steps without. Someone was moving in the hall. The muffled steps were peculiarly uneven too. Was it someone with a cane or a crutch?

I concluded it was the actor himself when the steps turned into his room. And I listened for the natural surprised cry that would have resulted if he had suddenly encountered the monkey there. But what I heard instead, through the partition, was a low stifled cry of horror, following which the irregular steps came out of the room and raced down the hall.

I got to my own door just in time to see a man disappearing around a turn. But it wasn't the actor. Instead it was a big man, who in every detail matched the description that had been given

to me of the hiding pirate, even to the peg-leg.

I had no proof that it was old Captain Kegg, never having seen him. Nor had I any proof that it was his living monkey that I had seen. But the fact that the two had been here together left little doubt in my mind. I felt too that they had been here for no good purpose, and so got to the phone quickly and aroused the innkeeper.

"Yes, sir," he spoke sleepily at the other end. "What is it, sir?"

"This is number fourteen," I spoke quickly. "I want you to come up right away. I think something has happened to the actor in the next room."

"You mean—" he began, thoroughly awake now, and alarmed.

"Never mind what I mean," I cut him off tersely. "Come up and find out."

I learned afterwards that he had his little switchboard so arranged that all inside calls, after he closed up for the night, went through the local office and then back to a phone at his bedside.

He had to dress before he came up. But he was quick about it.

I told him quickly what I had seen and heard, pointing to my removed screen as proof of my story of the monkey's visit. Then I related the peculiar footfalls to and from the actor's room.

My story brought an incredulous stare, as well it might. I think he suspected me of some kind of knavery too, until we went into the adjoining

room together. There we found the actor dead in his bed.

This was my first sight of a thing of that kind, and I fell back sickened; the bluish face, protruding fixed eyes and lacerated throat, forming a picture in my mind that I knew would stay there forever.

There had been a struggle—the tumbled bed clothing and unnatural cramped position of the body attested that. But the poor little actor had stood no chance against the brutal strangling force that had descended upon him in his sleep. He had been denied even an outcry, for once the claw-like death-dealing clutch had fixed itself on his throat it apparently never had relaxed. I could imagine the little man beating vainly against the strangling force with his puny arms, his blows falling fainter and fainter until— But I stopped there, trying not to complete the mental picture of his dying agonies. It was too horrible even to contemplate in imagination.

A slight sound at the door brought me wheeling, with added terror. But it was only the innkeeper's wife, who having been awakened with him, had followed him up the stairs to see what was wrong. Even in my fright I wondered how a woman of her size—for she was unusually large and ungainly—could have come up so quietly.

"Antone!" she stopped at her husband's elbow,

her own impassive face betraying not the slightest emotion. "What is it, Antone?"

"Look, Maria!" he spoke huskily, pointing. "The man is dead."

"Dead?" she repeated, going closer to the bed, with still no visible trace of emotion.

"It is murder, Maria! It is the little actor I told you about, who made so much fuss about his room. He has been killed. And our business Maria!—it will hurt our business, a crime like this."

"Oh, Antone!" Her voice betrayed emotion here, even if her broad face didn't. Concern for him and the things he had worked for, did it. "And we were doing so well. But maybe—" she began cunningly.

"No, Maria," her husband quickly cut her off, with a side glance at me. "We must let the law take its course."

It was I who finally put in a call for the village constable. He came, at a quarter of three, plainly as unused to a thing of this kind as we were, but wanting to do his duty. Again I was treated to an incredulous stare when I told my story, which was repeated to the county sheriff when he arrived, and later to the coroner.

Dr. Arnoldson had been called as an emergency measure. He pronounced the man dead, and later examined the body on request. As expected, he reported death by strangulation. After which

the body was removed to an undertaking establishment in the basement of a near-by furniture store and the necessary inquest was set for that afternoon at three-thirty.

CHAPTER VIII

DEDUCTIONS

Rockcliff was stunned by the tragic events within its borders. It had long prided itself on its peaceful law-abiding ways. Now, with shocked resentment, it awoke to the notoriety that only such a complex crime could have given it.

Airplanes, flying over Whispering Towers, snapped pictures of the scuttling head-hunters for wide publication. Failing to get a picture of old Kegg himself, prints of other notorious pirates were used to convey to the newspaper readers how the master of Whispering Towers *should* look. In the same way, unable to get a picture of the actual monkey concerned, other similar monkeys were pictured. Reporters, on the scene, let their imagination run riot. A dead actor!—a poisoned monkey miraculously returned to life!—a self-fortified old pirate of undoubted fabulous wealth gleaned—but how?—from the seas!—and it all centered around a boy who had to derive what satisfaction he could from seeing his picture sandwiched in between the pseudo-pirates and monkeys!

Dr. Arnoldson had cautioned me to keep entirely away from the reporters, as they would

pick up and magnify every little thing I said. As I would be required to testify importantly at the coming inquest, it would be much better, he advised, to withhold my complete story till then.

Following an early breakfast that morning, Dory and I drove to Madison in my car to see if we could pick up any clews of his father's whereabouts. We might just as well have saved ourselves the trip, for whatever correspondence had passed between dad and the detective had been purposely hidden or destroyed. Nor did I learn anything through Jerry when I wired him to make a similar search of dad's private papers.

So it was made perfectly plain to us that whatever forward steps were taken in the mystery's solution would have to come from our own and Dr. Arnoldson's efforts.

"Well, boys, what luck did you have?" Dr. Arnoldson inquired, when we met him in his office upon our return.

Dory shrugged expressively, displaying empty palms.

"Couldn't find anything, eh?" the doctor quizzed.

"No," Dory shook his head, disappointed. "And what have you been doing, Uncle Karl, while we were away?"

"For one thing I've arranged a meeting here shortly, to go over the leads in the case that have already turned up. For I thought that Poppy in

particular, as the star witness, should be somewhat prepared before going on the stand this afternoon."

"That sounds like a trial," I spoke uncomfortably.

"An inquest *is* a good bit like a trial as you'll learn, with the main difference that the meeting is presided over by the county coroner instead of a judge."

"But I've already told him everything I know," I declared. "I don't know what else I can tell him."

"That's what I want to take up with you, Poppy. With your best interests at heart, I want to make sure that you tell everything just as it occurred, without telling either too much or too little. You'll find yourself the target of many pointed questions. It may even appear to you at times that they are trying to implicate you in the crime. But just be yourself and tell the plain truth, without advancing any theories of your own, and I'm quite sure you'll come out all right."

Here Constable Neil Smithback and Dr. Foster joined us. Following the usual greetings, Dr. Arnoldson quickly took the meeting in hand.

"I don't need to remind you, gentlemen," he began gravely, "that a very serious crime has been committed in our midst. We are anxious to see the case closed and justice done. In calling this

meeting it occurred to me that we might make faster progress through an exchange of ideas."

"But aren't you going to get Trot down here?" the constable spoke, disappointed, his manner showing how much confidence he had in the great detective.

"We have one Trot with us already," smiled Dr. Arnoldson, with an affectionate nod toward Dory.

"I mean the boy's father," the constable spoke curtly.

"We'd get him in a minute if we could, Neil. But he isn't available."

A phone call came here for Dr. Foster, who went out, promising to be back in a few minutes. So the meeting continued without him.

"From what I've seen of the case so far," Dr. Arnoldson resumed, I've arrived at two major theories: one is that the crime was executed as planned. The other that it was another attempt on Poppy's life, and through a shifting of rooms at bedtime the crime miscarried."

"But, Arnoldson!—you aren't thinking that some beast actually climbed that vine and got into the wrong window?"

"If you're asking me, Neil, if I think the actor was strangled by a monkey, either intentionally or unintentionally, I'll say 'no' very quickly. In the first place, small as the man was, a monkey of the kind that was poisoned yesterday couldn't

have held him down, even if the animal had been crafty enough to get a strangle hold on the victim's windpipe to start with."

"But how do you account for the claw marks on the man's throat?"

"In one of two ways: the man, or woman, responsible for the strangling may have made the marks with an artificial claw of some kind, simply to give the crime a bizarre or misleading touch, or a monkey actually assisted in the killing."

"But why did you say man or woman? It couldn't have been a woman," the constable declared.

"I'm not so sure of that, Neil. This is between us, of course—I don't want it to go beyond this room till the inquest has brought out the facts—but I've found that the crime has had a very strange effect on Mrs. Rulens, the innkeeper's wife. With her strength she could have committed the deed."

"But she has no motive," the constable argued.

"Oh, yes she has. Did you take the actor's name, Neil?"

"Yes—Felix Hartwell."

"That's his stage name. His real name is Emil Rulens. Without his beard, he's the perfect image of his twin brother, Antone Rulens."

I gave a cry.

"That's it! Now I know."

"What?" Dr. Arnoldson turned to me quickly.

"Well, you know what I told you about the argument over the room?"

"Yes."

"Well, all the time they were arguing I kept wondering who the actor reminded me of. It was the innkeeper himself!"

The constable appeared worried.

"But, Arnoldson, you didn't shave the body—without consulting the coroner!"

"That was unnecessary," the doctor explained. "The undertaker soon discovered that the beard was false. He tried to get you, Neil—but you had gone to the Towers. So he called me in. We then got the innkeeper who, after a poor pretense of surprise, confessed that both he and his wife knew last night that the supposed Felix Hartwell was really the family black-sheep disguised. You'll find finger-print records of him in the Department of Investigation in Washington. He served one prison term of two years in New York and another of eighteen months in Illinois. So you can readily see the type of man he was."

"Then he wasn't an actor, after all?" asked the surprised constable.

"Oh, yes, he was an actor all right—of a sort. He might have been a good one, too, if he had given that as much attention as crime. It really is a good thing his going, though I'm hoping that Mrs. Rulens didn't commit the crime herself."

"But why would she?"

"For the same reason that a hen flies furiously at a hawk to save her chicks, and a mother cat will fight a weasel. We know Antone Rulens quite well, and respect him as a quiet-mannered hard-working little man. But I think we'd find, on closer investigation, that he trickily got the lion's share of his parents' property. I heard something about that when the old homestead was moved closer to the street, a few years back, and converted into an inn."

"Then you think that Emil Rulens came back for a more fair distribution of his parents' property, and that Mrs. Rulens killed him, to save the property for her husband?"

"I say it's possible, Neil. It's also possible that Antone himself committed the crime. On the other hand possibly neither of them did it. To go back to my other major theory, it may have been purely an attempt on Poppy's life. And the killer got into the wrong room."

"But a fool would have known the difference between that man and this boy."

"He should have, I'll grant," Dr. Arnoldson conceded. "But I still hold it as a possible theory."

The constable then turned to me.

"And what was that, about you and the actor switching rooms?" he queried.

I told him.

"Humph!" he grunted thoughtfully. "Maybe it *was* you they were after. But I still don't comprehend how any killer, short of a maniac, would have strangled that man for you. And what did you make of the poisoning, Arnoldson? Do you think the monkey really died?"

"Just a minute," spoke Dr. Arnoldson, as familiar footsteps sounded in the waiting room. "Let's get the answer to that directly from the man who knows the most about it."

Dr. Foster came in apologetically.

"Have I kept you waiting?" he inquired.

"To the contrary, doctor, you got here right on the dot. Now tell us the truth about that monkey. You treated it for strychnine poisoning and brought it to town supposedly dead. But *was* it dead? What's your opinion?"

"Most certainly it was dead," the veterinarian declared. "There isn't the slightest doubt in the world about it."

"Then it wasn't the same monkey that Poppy saw at the window?"

"It couldn't have been, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"It was the dead monkey carried there."

"How about that, Poppy?" Dr. Arnoldson asked me quietly.

"Well, it didn't look very dead to me," I shivered, from the memory of it.

"Then we'll assume that there are twin mon-

keys and that it was the living one that you saw. We'll further assume that it was in the room with the killer when the crime was committed. But that must have been earlier, for you say, Poppy, there was no sound in the next room, after you awoke, till old Kegg showed up so mysteriously?"

"I didn't hear a thing."

"All indications are that the crime was committed before you awoke—from my examination of the body I should say around one o'clock. And yet, an hour after the crime, the monkey concerned came back. Was it sent back? Was the killer lurking near by for some added purpose when it climbed to the window sill? Or did it simply return of its own accord?"

"But who do you think took the screens out, Arnoldson?—the monkey itself?"

"There's no indication of anything heavier having climbed the vine, Neil."

"No," the constable nodded to that, "I couldn't find anything myself. But it must have been a blamed smart monkey, to climb up that way and loosen two screens."

"All it took was a quarter turn of a few door buttons."

"But it took a smart monkey to do it, none the less."

"It's quite possible too, Neil, that the monkey unlocked the door to the death chamber."

"Letting the killer in from the hall?"

"Yes. And here my theories diverge: *If* it was an attempt on Poppy's life, as isn't at all improbable, it would seem that the killer, learning his mistake too late, sent the monkey around to unlock the other door. And that is when Poppy fortunately awoke."

A cry of horror came from me in spite of my efforts to stifle it.

"Then you think the killer was standing outside my door when I saw the monkey?"

"*If* that theory is correct, then it's very possible that the man was there, exactly as I say, waiting to get it. But if either Mr. or Mrs. Rulens committed the crime, for reasons given, then there may be no point at all to your removed screen and the presence there of the monkey."

"But granting that your theory about me *is* true," I spoke, with a shiver, "who do you think it was outside my door?—that man you saw in the meat market?"

Without answering, Dr. Arnoldson got out a thick scrapbook filled with pictured newspaper clippings.

"Did you ever see that man?" he asked me, pointing.

"Sure thing," I spoke without a second's hesitation. "That's the man I saw in the hall last night."

Dr. Arnoldson turned to the constable.

"It's Kegg, all right, Neil. For that's the only picture I ever saw of him. Now, what are we going to do about it?"

CHAPTER IX

FU WONG PU

Dr. Foster studied the printed picture curiously.

"How long have you had that clipping, Karl?" he inquired, evidently having come to certain ideas of his own regarding it.

"Oh, ten-twelve years, I imagine."

"I was going to say, Kegg is much older than that to-day."

"What do you call this anyway?" grunted the constable, thumbing through the book. "A private rogues' gallery?"

Dr. Arnoldson laughed. "Curiosity book would be a better name for it, I should say. It's made up of odds and ends that I've clipped from newspapers during the past twenty-odd years. Just a little hobby of mine."

"But how did you happen to save old Kegg's picture, Uncle Karl?" Dory asked curiously.

"Oh, the stories that I heard about him interested me, no doubt. Of course I never dreamed that some day I'd be getting the book out for a purpose like this."

"He's got a hooked nose like a parrot," laughed Dory, as he further studied the picture.

"Yes," I spoke up, "I noticed that last night."

Dr. Foster gave me an odd penetrating look.

"Well, you must have pretty sharp eyes," he grunted, "to recognize the captain from *that* picture. I can see all kinds of difference myself."

"That's right," Dr. Arnoldson quickly picked up the thought. "If the man you saw, Poppy, was the captain, he couldn't have looked exactly like this picture. This picture was taken years ago. So describe the difference."

"But there isn't any difference," I cried helplessly. "He looked exactly like that."

The two doctors exchanged meaning glances, to my discomfort.

"What do you think of it, Dr. Foster?" Dr. Arnoldson asked quietly.

"Well, I don't know much about this boy," Dr. Foster spoke bluntly of me. "But if his stories don't match up any better than that, I'm afraid he's due for an unpleasant session this afternoon at the inquest."

Dr. Arnoldson showed the anxiety he felt.

"I certainly am glad you brought up that point, Foster. It throws an entirely new light on the mystery. The whole picture will have to be rearranged. I was so sure of myself too."

And he fell to pacing thoughtfully, as old theories came down in his mind and others went up.

"Well, what now?" the constable asked quiz-

zically, having followed the pacing to a decisive pause.

"I think I'll drive out and see the captain," Dr. Arnoldson announced.

"He was in a very vicious mood when I saw him yesterday afternoon," informed Dr. Foster.

"You mean—about the poisoning?" Dr. Arnoldson asked abstractedly.

"Yes—and his own misery."

"Physical misery?" came quickly.

"Yes—gout."

"Was he in bed?"

"Yes—when I got there. But he was up in a pillowed chair when I left. And a worse tirade I never heard in all my born days."

"Tirade—what about?"

"Everything. His gout, and the poisoning, and the fancied negligence of that ring-eared cook of his—what's his name?"

"Jans."

"Yes, that's it. Well, he certainly kept poor Jans stepping. The corridors of that huge place of his fairly rang with his bellowing voice. I'm half inclined to believe the man's crazy myself."

"And you haven't any reason to believe, Foster, that he was deceiving you about his gout?"

"Not in the least. I even took a look at the swollen member myself to see if I could suggest some kind of relief."

Dr. Arnoldson drew a quick summary.

"Well, gentlemen," he spoke tersely, "this leaves us with very little justification for further suspicion of the captain, for obviously he couldn't have been the man that Poppy saw in the hall."

"Well, I don't care what you men think," I spoke hotly. "You can make me out a liar if you want to. But you asked me if the man I saw in the hall looked like that picture and I said it did. I stick to it too."

Dr. Arnoldson's firm friendly hand came quickly to rest on my shoulder.

"Poppy my boy," he spoke kindly, "nobody is trying to make you out a liar. We haven't the slightest doubt that the man you saw coming out of the death chamber exactly resembled the picture in the scrapbook. But you jumped to the conclusion that it was Captain Kegg. I foolishly accepted that conclusion, and since have been trying to implicate him in the crime. But I'm satisfied now that he has no connection with it, except that a double of his, of several years back, was in the inn last night."

"But if you're so sure the captain's out of it," inquired the constable, "why are you so anxious to go out there?"

"He's out of it so far as a direct connection in the crime is concerned," Dr. Arnoldson spoke confidently. "But there's still an indirect connection. That's what I want to talk with him about, to see if he can supply an added motive

for the crime and the earlier poisoning. He might know if he has a double at large."

"Well," said the constable, with a heavy grin, "I bet you don't get in when you get there. The old reprobate wouldn't let me in this morning when I went out to question him."

Dr. Arnoldson turned to his medical colleague with twinkling eyes.

"By the way, Foster," he chuckled, "don't you feel it's our duty to go out there and see the old gentleman about that vanished monkey of his? He commissioned you to mount it, and I think he ought to be advised of its disappearance."

"By jove!" laughed Dr. Foster comprehendingly. "You're right, Karl. Of course we should go out."

The constable's eyes narrowed good-naturedly.

"If you ask me," he growled, "I think you're a couple of crooks. I ought to pick you up on suspicion."

Dory swung in then beggingly.

"Can we go too, Uncle Karl?"

"Well, I don't see the need of *you* going," his uncle tried to tease him. "But I think Poppy should go, in case he's asked to tell what he saw."

"No need of *me* going, huh?" blustered Dory, in his heavy forceful way. "Don't kid yourself. I'm going to drive the car. How would you get there without a chauffeur?"

"Then we'll call it a party of four," concluded Dr. Foster.

Several patients came in then, requiring Dr. Arnoldson's attention. So the trip to Whispering Towers was put off till after lunch.

The little inn still preserved its cheerful inviting front. But within I found a pall of hushed expectancy. Reporters and others concerned talked softly in groups. The help went about white-faced and jumpy, deprived of the innkeeper's wife's capable guiding hand. She had taken to her bed. The dumpy little husband fluttered in and out of her room, still attentive to his scattered duties but showing plainly the strain he was under. It was not a comforting atmosphere. I was hopeful, if I had to stay on, that the coming inquest would clear the air of the constant oppression. It was too much like a morgue.

Dory came in while I was washing.

"I see you've got some new hooks on the inside of your screens," he commented, as he curiously looked around.

"Yes. I guess the innkeeper just put them on."

"I suppose they've got that other room locked up, huh?" he asked.

"I think so—I heard the coroner giving the sheriff orders about it. But why do you ask? Surely you hadn't any thought of going in there."

"Why not?" he spoke in that reckless daring way of his.

"Well, you certainly have some queer ideas," I told him, shivering. "I never want to see the place again myself."

Sharp voices reached us from the hall, where I had seen the peg-legged man disappear and where an outside door gave onto a downward flight of exposed wooden stairs. When we looked out we found the remaining actors in heated argument with the sheriff. They were due for a performance in Madison, they said, and wanted to get away. But the sheriff and coroner had jointly issued orders that nobody registered at the inn at the time of the crime was to leave before the inquest. And so, in addition to the actors, there were several other disgruntled guests in the place, who positively had no connection with the crime but who had to stay at the law's command nevertheless.

"I beg pardon," the haggard innkeeper appeared suddenly in my doorway, with unabated politeness, "there's a boy to see you, sir."

"A boy?" I spoke, surprised.

"A Chinese boy, sir. He is blind. I thought best to bring him up myself, though he seemed confident of his own ability to find you. Here he is, sir."

I went forward wonderingly as the boy from Whispering Towers entered, the innkeeper at the same time scuttling away like a scared rabbit.

"I am Fu Wong Pu," the boy bowed, with his

crossed hands in the sleeves of his native silk jacket, after the manner of his people. "I bring message for Poppy Ott from big captain."

"I am Poppy Ott," I told him.

"It is the captain's wish that Poppy Ott come with Fu Wong immediately."

"Come with Fu Wong where?" I asked.

"On bicycle. Captain say very much urgent."

"Do you mean to tell me," I asked, incredulous, "that you came to town on a bicycle?"

"Bicycle awaits by lower porch with vine," he spoke in his quaint way.

"But who showed you the way?"

"Fu Wong hear sounds in trees and rocks which tell him the way."

I turned to Dory.

"He's blind," I spoke softly. "Do you believe him?"

"Great noble ancestors of Fu Wong in celestial glory put eyes in pity in Fu Wong's ears. . . . Other boy a detective?"

"My father's a detective," Dory informed.

"Bicycle holds only two," the boy spoke meaningly.

"But I don't want to go out there with you," I told him, pitying him for his misfortune and yet fearing him too.

"Captain say very urgent," he stood quietly.

"What would you do?" I turned helplessly to Dory.

"Well," he spoke practically, "I certainly wouldn't go without finding out what the old buzzard wants."

"Buzzard is bird of prey which mangles innocent song birds," the boy drew himself up.

"Is the captain good to you?" I asked him curiously.

"Captain make much talk like thunder. But often when thunder is loudest rain falls gentlest."

"Well, I'll be cow-kicked!" I cried. "I don't know what to do."

"But what does the captain want with Poppy?" Dory asked for me.

"Voice out of the air say Poppy Ott poison monkey and see evil man with peg-leg. Captain hear with great anger and say, Fu Wong, you bat-eyed heathenish nitwit, go get this Poppy Ott so I can cut head off. So Fu Wong go on bicycle, where he fix extra seat for Poppy Ott."

"Voice out of the air!" Dory repeated wonderingly, turning to me. "What do you make out of that, Poppy?"

"He means the radio," I explained. "The news flashes."

"Oh, of course! Where are my wits?"

"Fu Wong suggest that we make all possible speed to not keep great captain waiting," the boy spoke respectfully.

"But don't you think I'd be rather foolish," I

spoke to him in his own simple way, "to go out there with you, to get my head cut off?"

"Elephant make much roar but nimble mouse easily escape killing tread," was the quaint way he had of telling me that I need have no fear of actually losing my head.

I finally sent him off, disappointed, with the promise that I'd drive out to the Towers with friends immediately after lunch. And I watched from the window to see if he really would pass on a bicycle, which he did, threading through the traffic with as much ease as one with full sight.

He had told us that he was guided by "voices in the trees and rocks." But I was more inclined to believe then that he wasn't as blind as he let on.

CHAPTER X

BISCUITS AND TEA

Our mission to Whispering Towers failed, except as it provided food for certain new conjectures. The captain received us thundering, his eyes ablaze in his apoplectic whiskered face, the queer chambers of his abode echoing with the force of his voice, and he was still thundering, from his high-backed cushioned chair, when we left.

The thunder at first was largely directed at me as the one who had done the most—however innocently!—to upset him. But the others came in for their share toward the end, particularly Dr. Foster for letting the monkey die in the first place and then losing the carcass.

In all, we were a meddlesome, incompetent, lying, unprincipled lot, seeking to distract a worthy old man's peace of mind with poison and scandal. We had killed his monkey—I got the full venom of his blazing eyes there!—and now we were seeking to involve him with the law. He had heard the story in full through the news flashes on the radio.

The reception took place in a huge stone chamber of medieval vaulted pattern which seemed

cold and clammy even in the heat of midday. Logs crackled cheerily in a great gaunt fireplace which tainted the entire atmosphere with escaping smoke, and for further warmth the shivering host had buttoned himself into a heavy gold-braided pea-jacket. He wore a master's cap too, pulled down on his wiry gray hair—the same kind of a cap, I should add, that I had seen on the man in the hall—and the troublesome swathed leg was extended to a pillowed hassock.

The learing-eyed Portuguese with his sleek even white teeth was much in evidence throughout our visit, as were also the two native head-hunters, both black-skinned men of stubbed sturdy stature, bushy-haired and beetle-eyed. At each new outburst of their thundering master they fingered their native cutlasses instinctively, ready plainly for whatever call might be made on them.

Except for grass-plaited trunks of their own manufacture, and showy toothed necklaces which hung to their well-filled stomachs, they were totally without clothes—a most unpromising pair I assure you! They moved about stealthily, critically appraising our heads from all sides, with perfectly understandable jerks of their own, occasionally whispering together in some guttural jargon over the probable merits of one particular head over another.

With the two capable elders at hand I hadn't the slightest fear of either the blustering master

or his ill-assorted hirelings. But frankly I did experience some uneasiness when the savages divided, after a final common choice, one squatting directly in front of me and the other behind, their purposeful little eyes never wavering from my neck.

This amused Dory.

"They're going to be awfully disappointed," he whispered, in his nonsensical way, "when they find out how empty your head really is."

"Jans!" the captain thundered here, more apoplectic in his manner than ever. "Where are you now, you thieving ungrateful scallawag? *Jans!*"

And at the final thundering cry, punctuated as it was with the sharp thump of a heavy cane, even the stone walls seemed to tremble.

"Aye, Captain!" the Portuguese bobbed into sight around the high-backed chair, his teeth showing under his ragged coal-black mustache.

"Some tea and biscuits for the gentlemen, Jans," came the sharp order. "And mind you, no cockroaches in the tea this time nuther. Do you hear me, you sluggard? Or do you need a touch of my cane to set your thin wits to working?"

"Aye, Captain! Tea and biscuits, you say. Aye, aye, sir."

And away he scurried like a driven rat.

"But, Captain!" demurred Dr. Arnoldson.

"We've just had our lunch, you know. And we shouldn't put you to any bother."

"Silence!" boomed the glowering host. "Ain't it enough that you and your meddlesome crew p'isoned my pet monkey and involved me with the port authorities, without tryin' to give me orders on my own ship? A Kegg knows his duty, sir, even among them as covets his own downfall. So silence, I say, or down in the hold you'll go with the rats, and you can lay to that."

Along with the ordered tea and biscuits, the scurrying Portuguese brought a folding table which he set up at the captain's elbow. And there we gathered to partake of the provided refreshments, the host serving with a great show of hospitality.

But he froze, with added thunder in his voice, when he detected a fly in one of the biscuits.

"Jans!" he bellowed, like an entangled bull. "Jans you idiot!—what's that?"

"Aye, Captain!" the attentive Portuguese popped into sight, saluting.

"Well, what is it, you blundering fool?—a fly or a raisin?"

The white teeth were bared in a wide grin.

"Aye, Captain—a fly. A very fine little fly with a blue body."

"And a fly I thought it was myself! But whether it be a fine little fly with a blue body or a fine little fly with a yaller body, I'll have

none of it on an occasion like this with gentlemen at the boards. So away with it, to the rats, or your head'll pay the penalty, you slovenly galley hand! Do you hear me?—away with it to the rats."

"Aye, Captain!"

The two doctors exchanged apprehensive glances over the questionable food. But evidently their experienced tongues detected nothing alarming, for they proceeded with proper courtesy, though gingerly, signaling to us to do the same.

His hospitality thus dispensed with, according to his own rules, the captain put all further questioning aside by brusquely dismissing us. And so, with the usual polite thanks, we filed out, with Jans guiding, and drove off.

"Well, Poppy," Dr. Foster spoke quizzically, as the towers disappeared behind us, "was that your man?"

"No," I told him truthfully. "The man I saw looked something like him. But he was much younger."

"More like the picture, eh?" Dr. Arnoldson put in thoughtfully.

"Yes," I nodded.

"If it wasn't for the peg-leg," mused Dr. Arnoldson, "I'd be tempted to believe it's a younger brother. But it would be ridiculous to assume that two brothers, with that difference in

their ages, would both have peg-legs, just alike."

"It isn't impossible," Dr. Foster asserted.

"Impossible—no. But quite improbable. It isn't a sensible theory at all."

"Do you think the captain knows who the other man is?"

"Well, Foster, your guess there is as good as mine. You heard everything that was said."

"But surely, Karl, you have some idea on the subject. You're usually pretty good at that. So let's have your opinion."

"Well," drawled Dr. Arnoldson, as he looked at the winding road ahead with narrowed eyes, "my main idea right now is that Captain Kegg is a big bluff. I don't know where he got his money. It's entirely possible that he got it from the sea as reported. But my opinion is, after our little visit with him, that the closest he's ever been to a pirate ship is in the pages of Stevenson's *Treasure Island*."

"Then you put him down as a complete fraud —is that it?"

"Yes—insomuch as his reported piratical background is concerned. I think he's just acting a part here. That bluster of his was just a silly veneer. And what was it, Poppy, that the Chinese boy told you about him?"

"Something about the rain falling gentlest after the thunder."

"By the way," Dr. Foster spoke curiously.

"Where was that Chinese boy? Did anybody see him?"

"I didn't," I said. "I kept looking for him too."

"Well," Dr. Arnoldson shrugged, "I make no pretense of understanding it myself. I may be all hay-wire in my theories of the man. Maybe he *is* a retired pirate. Maybe there's more to his silly thunder than I suspect. But he struck me as a big bluff."

"I thought sure he'd want to hear Poppy's story," mused Dr. Foster.

"So did I," nodded Dr. Arnoldson. "But he evidently is so cocksure of himself, in all he does, that he has no particular concern over anything outside his own protecting walls."

"I wonder if he shut that kid up," I spoke, worried.

"What for?" grunted Dr. Arnoldson.

"Well, he sent the kid to town for me on a bicycle. But I wouldn't go out with him. Maybe the kid got blamed for it."

"You aren't talking about the little Chinese boy?" Dr. Foster spoke curiously.

"Yes."

"But I thought he was blind."

"He is—supposedly," I answered.

"More trickery!" growled the veterinarian, darkening.

"Possibly," commented Dr. Arnoldson reflectively, "and possibly not."

"But you aren't contending, Karl, that a blind boy could ride a bicycle from there into town?"

"Did you ever watch the robins, Foster?"

"Yes—but what's that got to do with this?"

"Nature has equipped the robins and certain other birds with a sense of hearing so far beyond what we supposedly superior mortals have that there really is little comparison. So it doesn't seem at all improbable to me that a child, born blind, should be gifted by a kind Providence with added hearing. If you had ears like that and had always been in the dark, with only sounds to convey your surroundings, your development in sound interpretations might well amaze you."

"True enough," granted Dr. Foster. "But I still contend that a totally blind boy couldn't ride a bicycle that distance."

"Which is exactly what I think too," I put in.

"What is the boy like, Poppy?" Dr. Arnoldson inquired interestedly. "Can you give an accurate description of him?"

"Oh—he's about twelve or thirteen, I guess, with eyes that make you think of empty wells, and rather stiff black hair."

"Does he wear a cue?"

"No, but he was dressed like a native Chinese. He was a good-looking kid too, only I didn't enjoy having him around. He made me feel

that he was conscious of things around me that I couldn't see myself."

"I'd like to know where he came from," mused Dr. Arnoldson, "and what Kegg's motive is in keeping him out there. A boy like that! Well, it certainly is a strange household, all right—Kegg himself, whatever he is or isn't, and that Portuguese, and those oily-skinned head-hunters."

"Yes," I spoke quickly, "and did you see the way they watched my neck? It was an awful blow to them, I guess, when Kegg let me walk out on them."

"The next time," put in Dory, from the driver's seat, "go out in the dark and give them a break."

"They're probably just as much of a bluff as their master," surmised Dr. Arnoldson. "But still, it isn't the kind of a place that I'd care to invade in the dark myself."

"What did the boy mean," I asked Dr. Arnoldson, "when he told me that he heard sounds in the trees and rocks?"

"We can all hear sounds in the trees, Poppy," the doctor laughed. "In fact, it was the weird sounds in the trees at Whispering Towers that gave the place its odd name."

"Yes, I know—but he didn't mean sounds like that. I asked him who showed him the way to town on his bicycle and he told me he was guided by sounds in the trees and rocks. Do you understand what he meant, Dr. Arnoldson?"

"Well," came the thoughtful reply, "never having had a chance to examine the boy, or even talk with him, I can't say positively. I rather imagine he had reference to sound deflections, for everything that moves, you know, or creates action of any kind, produces sound. Naturally that sound, however slight, is subject to deflection by the objects about it. For instance, if the boy's sense of hearing is as acute as I suspect—and I'm talking now of an almost uncanny sense of hearing, akin to that of the robin—it's probable to believe that the boy can hear the deflected sounds of his slightest movements. So he'd know if he were approaching a tree or post or anything of an obstructing nature. That, in general, Poppy, is probably what he meant."

"Splendid theorizing, Karl!" applauded Dr. Foster jovially. "But I prefer to believe myself that the boy is merely a fraud, like his master."

The little Chinese boy meant nothing to me. Yet the appealing picture of him, as he stood so quaintly in my room, seeming not to doubt in the least that I'd go off with him on his bicycle, persisted in my mind.

I wondered if my refusal to go with him had worked a hardship on him at the Towers.

Not only had I not seen him there, but I remembered now that not a word had been said of him, or of my refusal to return with him.

It was strange and I was worried about it.

CHAPTER XI

THE INQUEST

PUBLIC interest that afternoon switched from the inn itself, around which a morbid murmuring crowd had milled with varying intensity since early morning, to the town hall, where arrangements had been made to hold the inquest in the chamber usually presided over by the local justice-of-the-peace. But to-day the tall grave-mannered coroner took charge, after much feverish running about in final preparation.

The investigation was just getting under way when Dr. Arnoldson and I got there, a patient having delayed him at his office at the last moment. So great was the crowd that overflowed into the hall and even down the outside stairs that the sheriff had to wedge a lane for us. This obvious preference stirred up caustic comment.

"I don't see why they took Dr. Arnoldson and that boy through, if they can't make room for us," one woman snapped, as she was gently but firmly pressed aside. "We were here first. I don't think it's fair at all."

"But, Tillie," a companion remonstrated, low-voiced, "don't you understand?—they're witnesses. That's the boy who saw the monkey."

"Oh!"

And I could feel the speaker's eyes, and dozens more, boring through me as I passed into the oven-like court room, where the sweltering six-man jury stood out so formidably on their raised platform.

The constable already was on the witness stand, so the sheriff got us into our reserved seats as quietly as possible.

I became the target of hundreds of curious eyes here. And so great was the murmur occasioned by my appearance, beside Dr. Arnoldson, that the coroner had to rap for order.

All sorts of garbled ridiculous stories had gone out. Some even had it that I actually had seen a monkey commit the crime. It was reported too that I held the fate of poor Mrs. Rulens in my hands. Hence the great interest in me and my anticipated testimony.

The newspaper men from the surrounding cities, mainly Madison and Milwaukee, sat together in a section arranged for them opposite the jury box. Their eyes too followed me with more than mere curiosity as I took my seat among the witnesses. A keen lot they were, the most of them in their twenties, and well-trained in their business. But I had been more than a match for them so far, thanks to Dr. Arnoldson.

Expert news writers that they were, I could readily imagine what they'd do with my coming

testimony. More than ever I dreaded giving it. But I had no choice in the matter. If I refused to take the witness stand I'd probably land in jail, which was unthinkable. So I plucked up what courage I could, determined sensibly to make the best of it.

Quiet having been restored, the coroner gravely proceeded with the interrogation of the witness.

"Then you weren't on duty in the business section when the crime was detected?"

"No, sir," the constable replied.

"What are your regular hours of duty?"

"From noon till midnight."

"And you saw nothing suspicious around the hotel when you went off duty at midnight?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know of anybody in this vicinity owning a monkey?"

"Not in town, sir—but there was one at Whispering Towers till it was poisoned yesterday."

"You've never seen a monkey around town at night?—particularly around the inn?"

"No, sir?"

"You say a guest at the inn phoned you at your home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice the time?"

"It was around two-forty-five."

"Did the guest give his name?"

"Yes—Poppy Ott."

"You got no call from the innkeeper himself?"

"No, sir."

"Did you wonder at the time why a guest should phone you instead of Landlord Rulens himself?"

"Not particularly. I just thought the innkeeper was too busy to phone."

"And what was the request made of you?"

"I was asked to go to the inn right away."

"Were you told then a crime had been committed there?"

"Yes—I was told a man had been strangled in his bed."

"By a monkey?"

"No, nothing was said about the monkey then."

"And when did you get to the inn?"

"About five minutes later."

"You were immediately taken up to the room where the crime had been committed?"

"Yes—by the boy who had phoned me. He was waiting for me downstairs when I arrived."

"What was his manner?"

The constable smiled grimly.

"Well, he was pretty white and shaky."

A light amused ripple followed that, which sent the blood to my face.

"Where was the innkeeper?" the coroner resumed.

"In the hall, outside the victim's room."

"Alone?"

"No, his wife was with him."

"Had any of the other guests been aroused?"

"I didn't see any then. But several showed up later, as the general commotion increased."

"Did Mrs. Rulens appear hysterical?"

"Yes—very much so."

"Did you suspect then that she and her husband might be hiding some knowledge of their own regarding the victim's identity?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ask either of them who the unfortunate man was?"

"Yes, sir. I asked the innkeeper."

"And what did he tell you?"

"He said the victim was an actor named Felix Hartwell."

"His wife heard that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And she ventured no correction?"

"No, sir."

"Then you are satisfied that they both wanted you to believe that the man's only known name was Felix Hartwell?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was your opinion upon sight of the body?"

"I saw the man was dead."

"Yet you summoned Dr. Karl Arnoldson as an emergency measure?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who did you leave with the body while you were phoning?"

"I was there myself till the doctor arrived—I phoned from the inn room."

"And the number of that room, please?"

"Twelve."

"You also phoned the sheriff when you found that a crime had been committed?"

"Yes, sir. And he in turn notified your department."

The coroner acknowledged this with a nod.

"What time did the sheriff arrive?"

"About three-fifteen."

"You remained at the inn how long?"

"Till four-thirty."

"Was the innkeeper about when you left?"

"Yes, sir."

"And his wife?"

"I think she was in bed. I didn't see her. And her husband told me she was in bed."

"Supposedly overcome by the horror of the crime that had been committed under her roof?"

"Yes, sir."

"Until then you hadn't suspected that her emotions might be other than the natural horror that one would expect under such circumstances?"

"No, sir."

"And has anything happened since then to change your opinion?"

"Well," the constable faltered, "I haven't had

any admissions from her direct. But she's been acting queer. I've heard a lot of talk, sir."

"What you merely heard isn't important," the coroner spoke dryly. "What I'm trying to bring out is that you have no proof that either Mr. or Mrs. Antone Rulens, or perhaps both, might have been implicated in the crime?"

"No, sir."

"Well, that will be all for the present, Constable Smithback, though you'll undoubtedly be recalled to verify the testimony of other witnesses. . . . And now, Dr. Karl Arnoldson, please."

The doctor gravely took the stand.

"You are a registered practicing physician?" asked the coroner.

"Yes, sir."

"Will you describe your connection with the case?"

"Constable Smithback called me just before three, asking me to come down to the Green Monkey Inn immediately as a man had been found apparently dead in his bed. I got there as quickly as I could, finding that the man had been dead for at least two hours."

"And to what did you attribute his death in your later official examination of the body?"

"The man evidently was attacked in his sleep and strangled."

"Dr. Arnoldson, the jury has already viewed

the body, with its clawed throat. We would now like to get your professional opinion on that. Do you earnestly believe that the contusions on the throat were caused by an animal of some sort, as, for instance, a monkey?"

"I can only give you theories there," the witness spoke with visible reluctance. "It would be easy for a murderer of a type to make it appear that an animal had helped in the killing."

"But your examination of the body produced no evidence that the crime was accomplished wholly by an animal of some sort, with claws?"

"No, sir."

"There was nothing in the nature of the contusions, or claw marks, to indicate to you that they were made by a living animal?"

"No, sir. The cuts may have been inflicted by the claws of a living animal, or a dead paw, manipulated for the purpose, after the actual strangling. I have no way of knowing to a certainty."

"Then your report is that the man was strangled in his bed by some unknown person, and that an animal, such as a monkey, may or may not have had a part in it. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you say that the victim struggled to free himself?"

"Yes, sir. All conditions of the body and bed clothing point to a struggle."

"Would this have created sufficient disturbance to arouse guests in adjoining rooms?"

"Not a good sleeper. About the only sounds would have been the creaking of the bed springs and the thrashing of the victim's arms."

"There would have been no outcry?"

"I doubt it. I think that after the strangling grip once fixed itself on the unfortunate man's windpipe, it never relaxed until the deed was accomplished."

"Did you see Mrs. Rulens when you were in attendance on the body?"

"No, sir."

"You talked with the innkeeper?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did he identify the body to you?"

"He said it was that of an actor named Felix Hartwell."

"Did it occur to you at the time that he betrayed any special agitation over the crime?"

"No, sir. He appeared stunned and horrified, as a man in his position naturally would be."

"And was he disturbed by its probable effect on his business?"

"I think he was."

"He mentioned it to you?"

"Yes, indirectly."

"How indirectly?"

"Well, he said his wife was so shocked over

the crime, and the bad name it might bring their inn, that she had taken to her bed."

"You weren't asked to treat her in any way?"

"No, sir."

"We may call you again, Dr. Arnoldson. But that will be all for the present. Now, Sheriff James Welter, please."

The sheriff's testimony was brief and unimportant. He substantiated the earlier testimony of the constable relative to the phone call and the time of his own arrival. But beyond that he had little to tell, as his investigations at the scene of the crime had brought out no new facts of any importance. However, with so many influential voters on hand, he sagaciously left the thought with the audience that he was working hard on the case and expected early developments.

The sheriff having been dismissed from the stand, the coroner busied himself momentarily with his papers, a welcome interim to the sweltering audience which fanned itself furiously.

Concluding with his papers, the coroner slowly put them down, in a general hush, and looked directly at me.

"We will now receive the testimony of Poppy Ott," he spoke, in a way that showed plainly enough how much he himself expected from the testimony.

CHAPTER XII

MY TESTIMONY

Dory declared afterwards that I shook so on my way to the witness stand that he could hear my teeth chatter clear to the back row where he and Kak sat eating peanuts. Which probably was an exaggeration, for he delighted in that. But I was plenty shaky nonetheless.

Not that I actually had anything to fear, as Dr. Arnoldson had so sensibly pointed out to me. But it was an unpleasant experience—facing all those hundreds of curious eyes, and all strangers to me.

But I got to the witness stand regardless. And then, when everything was quiet, the earnest questioning began.

"Your name, please?"

"Poppy Ott," I replied.

"And your address?"

"Tutter, Illinois."

"You're a minor, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. I was sixteen yesterday."

"Are your parents living?"

"My father is."

"You live with him in Tutter?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is his business?"

"He's general manager of a stilt factory."

"When did you arrive in Rockcliff?"

"Yesterday afternoon at about three o'clock."

"Have you ever visited Rockcliff before?"

"No, sir."

"You have no relatives or friends here?"

"No, sir."

"Then why did you come here?"

"I was sent here by my father to meet another boy."

"A Rockcliff boy?"

"No, sir—a Madison boy."

"His name, please?"

"Dory Trot."

"But why," the questioning became more pointed, "were you sent to Rockcliff to meet this boy, if his home is in Madison?"

"I don't know."

The coroner's forehead contracted slightly as he studied me.

"But surely," he proceeded, "your father wouldn't have sent you here, to meet a boy from another town, without giving you some sensible reason."

"He left Tutter himself yesterday morning before I did, telling me in a letter to come here, in a new car that he had just bought me, to meet the Madison boy."

Which really was a hurdling of facts, as I

hadn't known when I left home that I was going to meet a Madison boy. But I could see no need of going into all the intimate details.

"Where is your father now?"

"I don't know."

"But didn't he tell you, in the letter he left for you, where he was going?"

"No, sir."

"Is it possible for you to show the jury this letter?"

"I have it with me, but I prefer not to have it enter into my testimony. It is purely a personal matter between my father and myself."

The audience showed its disappointment at this, but the coroner passed on without comment.

"When did you register at the Green Monkey Inn?"

"About five o'clock in the afternoon."

"And was assigned what room?"

"Number twelve."

"The room in which the crime was later committed?"

"Yes, sir."

"But what room did you actually occupy last night?"

"Number fourteen."

"And you say you were sent here by your father to meet a boy from Madison?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then are we to infer that this boy, in turn,

had been similarly advised of the intended meeting?"

"Yes, sir, he was sent here, like me."

"By his parents?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where was this meeting to take place?—in the Green Monkey Inn?"

"No, sir. We were instructed to meet at the entrance to Whispering Towers."

This first mention of the unusual place brought a quickening of interest, especially in the news section.

"You refer to Captain Kegg's estate, just north of town?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you left for this specified meeting place immediately after your arrival at three o'clock?"

"No, sir—I had to make some purchases first."

"*Had* to? You mean this was required in your father's instructions?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were the purchases of a personal character?"

"I can tell you about them, if you wish."

"Very well, proceed."

"I went to a meat market first and bought a dozen frankfurters."

"Yes—and then?"

"I went to a grocery store and bought some mustard, and then to a bakery."

"And then what?"

"I drove to Whispering Towers where I built a fire near the gate and cooked the frankfurters."

"All in keeping with your father's instructions?"

"Yes, sir."

"There has been considerable scattered talk about a monkey from Whispering Towers that died from eating one of your frankfurters. And as this monkey, or one like it, is bound to come up in later testimony, I'd like here to have you tell the jury just how the poisoning occurred."

Which I did, as simply and directly as possible, concluding with an account of my own panicky flight, the whole creating a profound stir in the court room. The listeners took from my story —particularly the alert reporters—that either someone had tried to poison me, a fact not generally known till then, or I in turn, with misleading testimony now, had contrived the poisoning myself.

For a moment or two the attentive coroner seemed at a loss where to resume. But a brief reference to his papers put him aright, silence falling as he spoke.

"You say the monkey fell over in convulsions, which was your first intimation that the frankfurters had been poisoned?"

"Yes, sir."

"But if you had thought till then that the frankfurters were edible," I was asked closely,

"how do you account for the fact that you hadn't eaten any of the prepared sandwiches yourself? According to your testimony you prepared eleven, the twelfth frankfurter dropping accidentally into the ashes. From my knowledge of boys of your healthy age and their natural appetites, I should say that you would have been most likely to eat the first three or four sandwiches yourself. Yet you didn't. How do you answer that?"

"I didn't go there to cook the frankfurters for myself. I was instructed to prepare them for the boy I was to meet there."

"And hadn't he arrived at the time you left so hurriedly?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Some friends carried him through Rockcliff in their car and he was late getting back."

"Which obviously was a most fortunate thing for him. But where did you go upon your return to town?—to complain to the butcher?"

"No, sir, I went to see a doctor."

"But wouldn't it have been more natural, under the circumstances, to have gone directly to the butcher himself? Surely you must have suspected him of the poisoning."

"Well, I didn't know for sure that the frankfurters really were poisoned. So, before accusing the butcher of selling me poisoned meat, I

thought I had better have it examined. So I went to a doctor."

"His name, please?"

"Dr. Karl Arnoldson."

A murmur passed through the assemblage as the familiar doctor thus assumed a more important place in the growing tangle.

The coroner made a brief note.

"Dr. Karl Arnoldson, I believe, is a relative of this Madison boy you mentioned—Dory Trot?"

"Yes—an uncle."

"And did you know that at the time?"

"No, sir. I simply saw the doctor's sign and went in."

"What did his examination of the frankfurters disclose?"

"That they all contained a deadly amount of strychnine."

The coroner quickly stifled the horrified gasp that arose.

"Then, I suppose, with this proof of the poisoning, you took the matter up with the butcher?"

"Dr. Arnoldson did."

And I told how the butcher was called and what followed.

"But if *he* didn't poison the frankfurters," the coroner questioned closely, "and *you* didn't yourself, who did?"

"Dr. Arnoldson has a theory on that, but he

can doubtless give it to you better than I can."

"We don't want theories," I was told sharply. "We want facts."

Dr. Arnoldson here arose in his place among the witnesses and stepped slightly forward.

"Mr. Coroner," he respectfully addressed the officer in charge, as tomb-like silence fell about him, "I know it is most irregular for a spectator to interrupt the questioning of a witness in this way, but, if I may, I would like to clear up the point just presented by the witness, to avoid possible confusion in the minds of the jury. I have no actual facts on the poisoning of the frankfurters. All I have is a workable theory, which I will gladly present to the jury, with your generous permission."

"As supplementary evidence in the case at hand?" the coroner asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then proceed," came the curt instructions.

Dr. Arnoldson told then how, through his deductions, we were led to the dark entryway, and about the microscopic particles of strychnine that we had found there. The story was heard with rapt attention.

"But who is this mysterious man whom you suspect of the poisoning?" the coroner inquired.

"We haven't the slightest idea. But I saw him in the butcher shop when the frankfurters under discussion were purchased by the witness.

The butcher, too, remembers the man distinctly. He was a stranger to both of us."

That brought the sheriff angrily to his feet.

"But why haven't I been told of this before?" he demanded. "If this man you're talking about tried to poison the boy, as his testimony would lead us to believe, then the crime at the inn undoubtedly was another attempt on his life—for he and the actor switched rooms. So that makes the poisoner the murderer. I hope you'll pardon this abrupt intrusion, Mr. Coroner, but we're all here for the same purpose—that is, to ferret out the truth of the killing in room twelve at the Green Monkey Inn and see that justice is done. Certainly you will agree with me that my department should have been given these facts hours ago."

Half the room was on its feet now, with such excited craning and general commotion that the conversations around the jury box had to be suspended until order was restored.

"You are quite right in your contention, Mr. Sheriff," concurred the coroner. "But suppose I leave you to take that matter up with Dr. Arnoldson, when he has completed his supplementary testimony. Please proceed, doctor."

Dr. Arnoldson stirred uneasily.

"It may appear to the jurymen and spectators, Mr. Coroner, that I am usurping your authority,

but with your gracious consent, may I summon a supporting witness of my own?"

"But, Dr. Arnoldson," remonstrated the bewildered coroner, "this is most irregular. Our original witness is still on the stand. I permitted you to inject such added testimony here as you felt was necessary for clarity. Now you speak of summoning a witness of your own. I'm afraid we'll end in hopeless confusion."

"But wouldn't it be better, Mr. Coroner, to clear up this one point about the poisoned frankfurters and how they got into the witness' hands, than to go on to probably still more confusing matters and leave this one unsettled?"

"Possibly you're right," the coroner considered. "So proceed as you think best."

Dr. Arnoldson then summoned a rosy-cheeked young woman whom I recognized as the clerk who had waited on me in the bakery. Having properly presented the witness to the coroner and jury, he inquired:

"Miss Worth, do you recognize the young man in the witness chair?"

"Yes, sir," the girl replied.

"Tell the coroner and jury what you know about him."

"Yesterday afternoon he came into the bakery where I work and bought a dozen long buns."

"He had other packages in his hands?"

"Yes—two."

"And what happened when he was going out, with his third purchase?"

"A thick-set untidy-looking man was just coming in. The two collided in the doorway and two packages, just alike, fell to the floor."

I was staring now. That's exactly what had happened. But I had attached no special importance to it in my hurry to get out of town.

"Miss Worth," Dr. Arnoldson resumed, "we won't ask you to testify that the two meat packages dropped, as described, were actually switched before your eyes by the scheming poisoner who had arranged the collision in the doorway. But I dare say that to the coroner and jurymen the point is obvious. That will be all, Miss Worth. Many thanks for your cooperation."

Dr. Arnoldson then turned to the coroner.

"And that, Mr. Coroner, sums up my total knowledge of the poisoning. I want to thank you again, and the gracious jurymen, for the courtesy shown me in this very irregular intrusion. But I felt it would be to the advantage of all to have this very vital point cleared up now. Otherwise you may have gone on supposing that the young witness himself was guilty of the poisoning. He came near to being a victim, gentlemen, but he is not the instigator."

The coroner and jurymen alike seemed so bewildered here that it was thought best to call

a recess. And quickly collaring me, ahead of the eager reporters, Dory and Kak took me off to the drug store where we had the usual malted milks.

CHAPTER XIII

ADDED TESTIMONY

"You made a splendid witness, Poppy," Kak told me when we were all seated together in the drug store. "Your hair had just the right curl."

"Yes," put in Dory, "and thanks, old man, for getting my name in. Dory Trot, the mysterious boy from Madison, and the darling of fate. I guess that won't look so bad in the newspapers, huh?"

"I don't see how you can joke about it," I told him soberly. "It's all terribly serious to me. It's a miracle that we weren't both poisoned."

"Of course, it's serious," he conceded. "But why *be* so serious over it? Dad says people who get too serious over serious things lose their perspective."

"Probably your dad is right," I nodded earnestly. "But I wasn't brought up that way, unfortunately."

I thought, when the inquest was resumed, that I would be returned to the witness stand. But Dr. Foster was called instead.

Following the usual preliminary questions, the coroner asked:

"Dr. Foster, were you summoned to Whispering Towers yesterday afternoon?"

"I was."

"By whom?"

"The owner—Captain Kegg."

"And for what purpose?"

"To treat a pet monkey of his, an orang-outang, which had been picked up in the road in front of his place apparently poisoned."

"And what was your final opinion of the case?"

"That the monkey had eaten some food containing strychnine."

"Did the animal die?"

"It did."

"And I believe you brought the carcass home to mount, at the owner's request?"

"I did."

"Did you see any other similar monkey when you were there, or hear any reference to one?"

"I did not."

"Then from what you saw and heard, during the period of your visit, you have no reason to believe that there is another living monkey there?"

"No, I haven't."

"You're a taxidermist as well as a veterinarian?"

"Of a sort—yes."

"Have you ever been called on before to mount a monkey?"

"No, I have not."

"Do you know of anyone in or around Rockcliff who has a pet monkey?"

"No, I don't."

"Where do you do your taxidermic work, Dr. Foster?"

"I have a small work shop in back of my home."

"And there's where you took the dead monkey?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it true, Dr. Foster, that the carcass later disappeared?"

"Yes, it did. When I went out at bedtime to lock up I found the door open, and the carcass was gone."

"But you haven't the slightest belief that the animal recovered and walk out itself?"

"No, sir."

"In fact," the coroner sought a stronger statement on this point, "you are willing to testify most emphatically that it did not, or rather that it positively *could not* have come to life. Am I right?"

"You most certainly are."

"Then the only practical answer left to the disappearance is that the carcass was stolen?"

"Yes—that's my opinion."

"Can you in any way account for this unusual theft, or suggest a use that a dead monkey could be put to that would justify its theft?"

"No, I can't."

"You saw no suspicious-looking people around your place last night?—as, for instance, the man just described by Dr. Arnoldson?"

"No, I didn't."

"And the carcass is still missing?"

"It is."

Dismissing the witness, the coroner then turned to the attentive jury.

"The point I am trying to bring out and emphasize, with the thought of coming testimony in mind, is that the monkey concerned—the monkey that ate the poisoned frankfurter—actually died, beyond all possible doubt. So, as the testimony proceeds, involving a monkey, you will have to determine whether or not it was the dead monkey, in the tricky hands of some unknown manipulator, or another living monkey of similar appearance. Will Mr. Gordon Largay take the stand, please."

This was a new name to the spectators, who craned curiously as a man of more than average size and height, dressed very nattily, and quite handsome with his even features and expressive eyes, took the witness chair

"Your profession, Mr. Largay?"

"An actor, sir," came the reply in a pleasantly modulated voice.

"You were an associate of the victim's?"

"Yes, I was."

"How long have you been directly associated with him?"

"About a year."

"And had you known him longer than that?"

"I probably had heard of him, as a fellow actor, or may even have been in the same vaudeville billing with him. But I did not actually become associated with him, or even form a speaking acquaintance with him, till about a year ago."

"And what brought this acquaintance about?"

"Well, sir, in our profession, word often gets out when a character of a certain type is required. And having heard that a part was open in my company, fitting him, he came to see me about it."

"Giving his name as Felix Hartwell?"

"Yes, that's the name he gave me."

"Have you ever known him by any other name?"

"No, sir, though of course I realized from our first association that Felix Hartwell was just his professional name, the same as Gordon Largay is mine. But as long as he did his work well, and fitted into our little company in a gentlemanly and congenial manner, I wasn't particularly interested in his real name."

"Then you didn't know, when you stopped for the night at the Green Monkey Inn, that his real name was Emil Rulens, and that he was a twin brother of the innkeeper's?"

The actor's testimony faltered visibly here.

"No-o," he declared finally. "But I think I should add that I immediately saw the resemblance between the two."

"Did Felix Hartwell, as I shall call him, wear a false beard continuously?"

"Very much of the time, as he used a beard in his part in the play."

"But you have seen him without the false beard?"

"Oh, many times!"

"Then you surely *must* have been struck by the resemblance between the two men when you met the innkeeper last night. I never saw two men myself who looked more alike."

"Well, I *did* detect the resemblance, as I say, and wondered about it. Possibly if I hadn't been so tired, after the day's trip, I might have questioned Harty, as we called him about it."

"How far did you drive yesterday?"

"We closed our booking in Fort Wayne, Indiana, night before last, and were due to open in Madison this afternoon."

"But if you were heading for Madison, why did you stop overnight in Rockcliff?"

"Because of the rates. They're much lower here. And it seemed a very pleasant little place."

"How many are there in your company?"

"We carried five."

"You travel in a car of your own?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time did you arrive here last evening?"

"About eight-thirty, as I recall."

"How many rooms did you occupy?"

"Four. Three of us had single rooms, myself, Harty and Jordon our heavy man, and the other two slept double."

"Is your company composed wholly of men?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know, when you engaged Felix Hartwell, that he had a prison record?"

The actor appeared offended by this.

"I not only did *not* know it, sir," he spoke with dignity, "but I am learning it now for the first time."

"You say that his part in your play called for a false beard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Mr. Largay, I want to ask you a few very important questions. Did you know, when you left Fort Wayne yesterday morning, that you were going to spend the night at the Green Monkey Inn?"

The reply was emphatic.

"Mr. Coroner, I most assuredly did not, as I never had heard of Rockcliff before, but it was our plan to spend the night in some inexpensive small-town inn, preferably close to our destination."

"Then you simply drove into town without knowing or caring what town it was, and finding

a likely looking inn decided to put up for the night. Is that it?"

"Well, not exactly. For Hartwell had mentioned the town to us when we got within an hour's journey of it and during the last hour I'll confess we really were heading for it. But until then, as I say, I never had heard of it."

The coroner's whole manner betrayed exultation.

"Mr. Largay," he said with high satisfaction, "you have given me exactly the answer I was hoping for, and that is that it was the victim himself who suggested the stop. The fact that he came here in what we can safely term a disguise—directly into his twin brother's home, and with every intention of deceiving that brother—proves that he had a hidden ulterior motive. I suppose it would be useless to ask if you know what that motive was?"

"I most assuredly do not, sir," the actor again betrayed indignation.

"From your observation of Felix Hartwell, Mr. Largay, and your contact with him, would you say he was particularly superstitious?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!—very much so. We often joked him about it."

"Then the disturbance he created over the particular room assigned him in no way surprises you?"

"Not if he really considered it room thirteen.

I couldn't fancy him sleeping in such a room under any circumstances."

"And when did you last see him alive?" came the quiet inquiry.

The actor seemed overcome by emotion but quickly checked himself.

"About nine-thirty, sir. Several of the fellows stopped in to chat with him, for we all considered him a jolly little chap."

"His resemblance to the innkeeper wasn't mentioned at that time?"

"No, sir."

"What is the number of the room you occupied?"

"Twenty-one."

"That is on the same floor, I believe, and near the rear outside stairway?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time did you retire?"

"Immediately after leaving Harty—about nine-thirty, I should judge."

"Then it is reasonable to conclude that by ten o'clock you were sound asleep. Is that correct?"

"Oh, I should say much sooner than that, Mr. Coroner. Nine-forty-five at least. I dropped off almost instantly."

"Did you sleep soundly throughout the night?"

"Very soundly."

"And you heard no suspicious sounds in the hall?—no doors opening or closing, as for in-

stance the door giving on the outside stairs, or any unusual irregular footfalls, as you might expect from someone with a peg-leg?"

"No, sir."

"When were you advised of the crime?"

"It was early—the sheriff awakened me—I think it was around three-thirty, or four. I really didn't notice, sir—it was so—so horrifying."

"Mr. Largay, do you carry any animals with you in your act?"

"No, sir."

"Then you do not own a monkey?"

The actor shuddered perceptibly as he intelligently saw the purpose of the question.

"No, I've never owned a monkey, and now I never want to see one again."

"One final question—had Felix Hartwell ever mentioned any enemies to you, or expressed any fear that some day he might meet some such fate as this at the hands of a one-legged man?"

"No, sir."

Following Mr. Largay's dismissal from the witness chair, the other actors came by turn, giving practically the same testimony, the whole troupe seeming still dazed by the tragedy.

CHAPTER XIV

CONTINUED QUESTIONING

THEIR joint testimony completed, the four depressed actors were permitted to check out and leave for Madison, to fulfill their engagement there. I didn't see them leave myself, as I was kept in the court-room, but Dory was on hand when they pulled out. He told me later how the other disgruntled guests hurried from the inquest chamber to the inn, following their inconsequential testimony, all seeming to want to get away from the ill-fated spot as quickly as possible.

The actors and miscellaneous guests thus disposed of, the coroner then returned me to the witness stand, where I was asked to relate just how the exchange of rooms had come about.

"Then," the corner proceeded, at the conclusion of my story, "it really was you who suggested the change?"

"Yes, sir," I acknowledged.

"Did the changing of rooms inconvenience you in any way?"

"No, I simply had to remove my luggage from one room to the other."

"And did you suspect, when you suggested the

change, that another attempt might be made on your life in the room originally assigned to you?"

I shuddered from the picture this question aroused.

"No, sir," I spoke huskily.

"But you feel now that the crime may have been an attempt on your life?"

"Yes, it may have been," I conceded, "though it's hard for me to comprehend how a man with a beard could have been mistaken for me, even in the dark."

"Can you think of any reason why anyone should thus seek to put you, and probably your Madison friend with you, out of the way?"

"No, sir, unless it's some unknown enemy of my father's."

"Dory Trot, I believe, is the son of a famous detective?"

"Yes, sir—Harrison Trot."

"Was your father ever a detective?"

"Yes—of a sort."

I suppose the newspaper men wondered why I flushed. But having been taken into my confidence, you'll understand.

"Do you think your father knew you were going to run such dangers as this when he sent you here?"

"No, sir," I spoke emphatically. "He may have suspected dangers of a sort, but I know he

wouldn't have let me risk my life without warning me."

The coroner moved about gravely.

"My boy," he finally stopped over me, "I think you are making a serious mistake by withholding your father's letter from your testimony. Everything would indicate to me that he fled in the face of some sudden peril, going back probably to his detective days, and he sent you off to circumvent that peril which then became directed at you. While Dory Trot is also involved, I consider you the main target. So for your own sake, as well as for a hoped-for speeding up of justice, I am going to ask you to reconsider your earlier decision regarding the letter, and urge its frank submission here."

I turned helplessly to Dr. Arnoldson.

"What shall I do?" I asked.

"Whatever you think best, Poppy," he advised gravely. "As you have already stated, the letter is purely personal. Having seen it myself I fail to discern where it can have any bearing on the crime committed, except that the meeting between you and my nephew was arranged here, and specifically at the spot where the monkey was poisoned. But I see no particular disadvantage in the presentation of the letter, as our very capable coroner has suggested, if you feel the publicity given it will not embarrass you."

"Very well," I decided quickly. And having

the letter in my inner coat pocket, I got it and handed it to the coroner, who read it to himself, very slowly, the entire audience watching with scarcely a sound, all hoping of course that the letter would next be read aloud.

"And may I see the mentioned cipher too?" the coroner requested when he had finished.

"I lost it," I told him.

"That isn't an evasion, my boy?" he asked quietly.

"No, sir," I declared. "I thought I had it with the letter. But when I came to look for it, to compare it with the other half, it was gone."

"But you *do* have the other half?"

"I haven't, but Dory Trot has."

The perplexed coroner then turned to Dory's uncle.

"Dr. Arnoldson, I don't want to probe too deeply into personal matters of this sort. But you seem to enjoy the complete confidence of both the witness and your nephew, and I would like to get your opinion here. From what you have seen of the mentioned cipher—that is, your nephew's half—would you say that it has any direct bearing on the crime committed?"

"No, sir," Dr. Arnoldson spoke on his feet, "except that it contains some unknown reference to a monkey's paw, which, in view of last night's events, opens a wide range for imaginative speculation."

An amazed murmur swept through the audience.

"And am I to understand that your nephew was given his half of the cipher by his parents?"

"Yes—by his father."

"Well, wouldn't it be a sensible plan to get his father down here immediately to find out what this mystery is all about? In that way we could quickly determine why the two boys were sent here, with such mystifying instructions, and what the cipher means with its reference to a monkey's paw."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Coroner, but Harrison Trot cannot be reached at this time. He has disappeared as completely and mysteriously as Mr. Ott. We absolutely can find no trace of him."

Which brought another wave of amazement.

"Dr. Arnoldson!" cried the bewildered coroner. "This is astounding!"

"I think myself," Dr. Arnoldson delved into theories, "that the completed cipher would have made everything clear, thus supplying the two boys concerned with the next step in what was obviously a planned adventure of some sort. It would appear from Mr. Ott's letter, in your hands, that the two fathers went off together to some unknown place—or at least to a common predetermined plan—and expected the sons, brought together here, to follow them. To do that intelligently the boys would have required

further instructions of some sort. Which, to my notion, was the sole purpose of the cipher."

"You say it contained reference to a monkey's paw," the coroner proceeded thoughtfully. "Do you conclude from that that the poisoning of the Whispering Towers monkey—where the boys were sent—was intended?"

"No, unless there's some unknown scheme of great magnitude in the background, involving even Captain Kegg himself. The poisoning couldn't have occurred, as it did, unless someone was there to put the monkey over the wall at precisely the exact moment. And how could anyone have foreseen that the witness would drop one of the frankfurters in the ashes? It is more obviously an attempt on the boys' lives, more particularly the witness, as you say. And it may all go back to either Mr. Ott's or Harrison Trot's boyhood. It seems they grew up in the same locality in Tennessee. But like the witness, I do not believe that either father contemplated such perils as the boys actually fell into. The fathers probably had a plan of some sort but obviously that plan miscarried, leading first to the unintended poisoning of the monkey and then to last night's tragedy."

The coroner's final decision to withhold the letter and incomplete cipher till it might seem more necessary to include them as evidence in the case, brought him great unpopularity with the

listeners, particularly in the news section, as the angry murmur there disclosed. But he proceeded complacently.

"Now, Mr. Ott," he addressed me formally, "you've explained to us how the exchange of rooms came about—you say you didn't know the man you exchanged with, never had met or seen him before, you didn't even know his name, though you say you did know he was an actor, having been on hand when the show troupe registered. You further have made clear to us that your suggestion to exchange rooms was purely an act of courtesy on your part and that you had no thought of self protection. Also you have agreed with me that the crime may have been another blundering attempt on your life. Now, will you pick up your story, from the moment of your awakening, and tell exactly what happened at your window and in the hall outside your room. Proceed, please."

This evidently was considered by the combined listeners a supreme moment in the proceedings, for they hung breathlessly on each uttered word of my testimony, their emotions rising to a horrified peak as I came finally to the detection of the crime itself in the adjoining room.

Then came the detailed questioning.

"So you really thought that the man you saw in the hall was Captain Kegg?"

"Yes, sir."

"But why did you feel so sure about it—never having met him?"

"Well, he had a peg-leg and a captain's cap—and I just jumped to the conclusion that it was Kegg, having heard so much about him that afternoon."

"Would you recognize the man if you were to see him again?"

"Yes, but I know now that it wasn't Captain Kegg himself, as I thought, for I had tea with him this afternoon, and while he has the same kind of a wooden leg, and wears the same kind of a cap, he looked entirely different."

"Entirely different—how?"

"Well, much older and more grizzled."

"Then it is your positive testimony that the man you saw in the hall was not Captain Kegg, as earlier reported?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think it could have been the man who exchanged the meat packages with you?"

"No, for he hadn't a peg-leg."

"Did the man turn in the hall, showing his face?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he see you watching him?"

"I doubt it. He seemed to be looking back at the door of the other room, as though he was afraid that some horrible thing he had just seen there was liable to start after him."

"Horror-struck—is that what you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long did you see him?"

"For just an instant. Then he disappeared around a turn in the hall."

"Did you hear any doors open after he disappeared as, for instance, the door giving on the outside stairway?"

"No, sir."

"But he could have gone out that way without your hearing him?"

"Oh, sure! In fact I think he did go out that way."

"Did he try any of the other doors before going into room twelve?"

"No, sir."

"He went directly to that particular room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he rap?"

"No, he just opened the door and walked in."

"Did he open it stealthily?"

"No—but he wasn't noisy about it. I think he intended to open it quietly."

"The door was unlocked?"

"Yes, sir."

"You heard him enter and a moment later he rushed out as though in a panic. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he utter any distinguishable words?"

"No, he just gave a horrified cry and ran out."

"Leaving the door open behind him?"

"No, he closed it."

"With a bang?"

"No—but quickly."

"How long was he in the room?"

"Hardly a minute."

"Then you think he entered the room without any knowledge of the crime committed there, and upon discovering it fled horrified?"

"Yes, that's the way it sounded to me."

"And what time was this?"

"About two-thirty, I imagine."

The coroner moved about puzzled.

"It's hard to comprehend how a man of that unusual description should go there at that late hour unless he had some connection with the crime. Yet your account of his movements favors him. He is a part of the mystery fabric of the case, but obviously not the main villain himself. But let us go back to the monkey. You say, when you awoke, that it was grinning at you hideously from your open window, and that a screen had been removed from the outside and dropped below. Later you discovered that a screen from room twelve, beside you, had been similarly removed, which awakened your suspicions, resulting in the discovery of the body. But you didn't actually hear a monkey in the next room, or see one go in or out of the window?"

"No, sir."

"Then your only glimpse of the monkey was in your own moonlit window?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you actually see it hop about on your sill?"

"No-o," I faltered. "But I heard it scratching there."

"But it *did* grin at you, you say?"

"Yes, it did."

"Silently?"

"Yes, sir."

"Suppose we could re-enact that scene. Suppose, for example, I climbed the vine with the dead monkey and manipulated its paws on the sill. Suppose further that it had a naturally fixed grin on its face. Would that fit the description you have given of the intruder?"

"But it couldn't have been held there that way," I cried. "For I examined the vine under my window, and there's no sign of anything having climbed up there bigger than the monkey itself."

"A ladder could have been used. But let us not go too deeply into that. The point that I am trying to bring out is that it *could* have been the dead monkey that you saw."

"Well, maybe it was," I gave in, bewildered. "But it certainly didn't look very dead to me."

"Please don't misunderstand me," the coroner spoke hastily. "I'm not trying to influence your

testimony. If you say positively that it was a living monkey, then we'll assume it *was* a living monkey, even an exact twin of the other one."

"I thought maybe it was a ghost," I shivered.

Which brought a scattered ripple.

"Well," the coroner spoke dryly, "I think we can safely dispose of the ghost theory, concluding that it was, as you say, a living monkey and that it got away before you got to the window. Or if the jury finds your testimony on that one point rather slight, they can, if they prefer, conclude that you were frightened by the manipulated dead monkey, though what the purpose of such an act could be is beyond human comprehension. But enough of the monkey. You say you summoned the innkeeper and together entered the adjoining room. The door was still unlocked?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the key in the lock?"

"I didn't notice."

"How long were you two in the room before Mrs. Rulens arrived?"

"Just a moment or two."

"Was she dressed?"

"Yes, all except her shoes."

"You particularly noticed that she was without shoes?"

"Yes—I didn't hear her come up. I saw then she had soft slippers on."

"Was the innkeeper fully dressed?"

"He had on his trousers and shirt—but not a coat."

"And shoes?"

"Yes, because I noticed they were unlaced."

"Which would make it appear that he had just gotten out of bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he appear horrified by your joint discovery of the body?"

"Yes, extremely so. He could scarcely talk."

"And his wife?"

"Well, she may have been horrified, but I couldn't tell much by her manner."

"Did either of them speak then of their relationship to the victim?"

"No, sir."

"What *did* they say?"

"Well, she came up behind us and said, 'Antone!—what is it?' And he said, 'It is murder, Maria!—it is the little actor who made so much fuss about his room. He has been killed. And it will hurt our business.' Then she started to say something, but he hushed her up."

"Hushed her up how?—by clamping a hand over her mouth?"

"No, he just cut her off with some remark about the law should not be interfered with."

"Could you distinguish anything she said, before she was stopped?"

"No, sir."

There the inquest adjourned till the following morning at nine-thirty, at which time it was expected that the testimony of the two concluding witnesses (the innkeeper and his wife) would give the case an entirely different turn.

CHAPTER XV

A NIGHT OF TERROR

I DRESSED and went down to dinner at six-thirty finding but a scattering of guests and everywhere a morbid foreboding air that gave me the cold creeps. I was thankful when Dory called up at seven, suggesting that he and I and Kak drive to Madison to see a picture show.

The sky was overcast when we came out of the theater at eleven, and spits of lightning followed us home, where, after disposing of the other two on Kak's front porch, I put my car in a public garage for the night.

I got in just ahead of the storm which filled the rambling inn with ghostly echoes as the rain and wind together beat furiously on the tin roof. There was an eerie forlorn howl to the wind too as it whipped the corners.

My thoughts went to the pines at Whispering Towers, and what must be going on there now. Brrr! That place, and this, certainly provided the ideal setting for a murder mystery. There was no mistaking the sinister oppressive atmosphere that hung over the now storm-beaten inn.

I couldn't shake off the feeling that there was still some hidden lurking peril here. For a mo-

ment or two I was tempted to call up Dory and invite myself to sleep with him. I could join him after the storm. But if I did that he probably would guy me unmercifully, which wouldn't be so pleasant in a strange house. So I decided, with stiffened courage, to remain where I was. And why not? With those added hooks on the screens, and a locked door, I ought to be perfectly safe. Besides I had no actual proof that there was any definite hidden peril here. It could be purely imaginary.

The little innkeeper was busy closing windows when I came in. But evidently he heard me mount the stairs, for he appeared almost immediately with a pitcher of ice water.

"If you find this room at all unpleasant, sir," he spoke, in a subdued voice, "I can easily transfer you to a very desirable room in the east wing."

"But what makes you think I'm liable to find it unpleasant?" I sought to draw him out.

"Well, I thought, sir—it being so close to the other room—and after what happened last night—"

"Oh, I don't mind that," I stopped him. "But I'm mighty glad you put those extra hooks on the window screens. Otherwise I think I'd have kept the windows down all night, no matter how stuffy it got in here."

This reference to the windows drew his eyes there.

"It's very strange, sir—about that monkey," he spoke puzzled. "I can't understand it."

"Well, there's plenty more in the same boat," I told him, "the coroner included. But you want to forget what I told you about that peg-legged man."

"Why?" he asked quickly.

"Because I was all wrong about it. It wasn't Captain Kegg at all. As for the monkey, all we know is that it was here last night and possibly in the other room. But no one knows *why* it was here, or where it came from, unless, as some think, it was that dead monkey."

The listener's eyes widened.

"But, sir—that's impossible. For you say it grinned at you, and moved about."

"The theory is that someone on a ladder made it move," I explained.

The innkeeper tried to reconcile this with the obvious claw marks on the victim's throat, and failing, adopted a new track.

"I wanted to ask you, sir," he began anxiously, his manner showing that he had come up as much for this as to inquire into my comfort, "if my wife's name was mentioned at the inquest."

"Yes, it was," I told him shortly.

He moved about trembling, first patting an almost imperceptible wrinkle in the bedspread and then nervously rearranging the dresser articles.

"I'm afraid," he finally turned to me, white-faced.

"Afraid of what?' I asked him, magnetized by his unusual conduct.

"Of what may happen to Maria, sir—my wife."

"But nothing is liable to happen to her," I told him, with as much hope as possible, "if she's innocent."

"Maria was up last night, sir," he proceeded, with childlike candor. "I woke up and found her place empty. I thought she had gone to close a window in the kitchen. But she was gone so long I got up to find her. And I met her coming down the stairs."

Here a maid came running.

"Oh, Mr. Rulens! Mr. Rulens!"

"What is it, Susan?" he met her anxiously in the doorway.

"It's Mrs. Rulens, sir," the girl spoke excitedly. "She's calling you again."

"Tell her I'll be down in just a moment, Susan," came the quick instructions. "And please keep the cold cloths on her head till I get there."

Then he turned apologetically.

"I had to close your windows as the rain was coming from that side. But I trust the room will cool off quickly, sir, when the storm is over—

or, if you wish, I can transfer you to another room, as I suggested."

"Evidently you aren't very crowded to-night," I commented.

His face fell.

"No, sir. It is the first ill effects of those newspaper stories. Travelers do not like to patronize such places. I may even have to close up."

"Oh, I don't think it'll be that bad," I encouraged. "People soon forget such things."

"And shall I transfer your luggage to another room, sir?" he asked eagerly.

In fact he was so obviously insistent about it that he aroused my suspicions.

"You almost act as though you *want* to get me out of this room," I spoke bluntly. "What's the matter?—is there something wrong with it?"

Which set him to bowing and scraping.

"Oh, no, sir—no indeed, sir!" he protested. "I was thinking only of your comfort."

I found myself taking a sudden dislike to him. He was entirely too servile—he gave me the impression that he used it as a cunning cloak. Besides, I couldn't see the point of him telling me that story about his wife. It certainly didn't strike me as manly. So I was glad when he hurried off.

The rain-soaked vine outside my window danced in the growing gale, reminding me un-

pleasantly of the impish face that I had seen there, while overhead the tin roof seemed suddenly tenanted by a million dancing skeletons. It seemed to me I never had heard such clattering commotion in all my life.

But finally the storm passed over, with subdued drumbeats and weakened glare. With only the water dripping from the eaves now, I threw up my windows, to admit the delightfully freshened air, and got ready for bed, taking particular pains, as you can imagine, to turn the key in the lock.

Straggling travelers, delayed by the storm, kept the busy little innkeeper up beyond his usual hour, contrary to his gloomy expectations. As I heard him pattering past my door, I found myself wondering what turn his coming testimony would take.

Was his wife guilty, as he evidently wanted me to believe? And would his testimony help to establish that guilt?—or maybe his own? But how about the monkey?—and all the things that had gone before? Was it to be concluded, on a moment's notice, that this was all circumstantial, and had no definite bearing on the crime?

One had to take one view or the other—either that the pair in the inn *had* desperately put their relative out of the way to save their property, and possibly their own lives, or someone had bunglingly attacked the actor for me.

The innkeeper was still pottering about below when I finally dropped off at midnight, the noise by then having slowed down to a rhythmic drip, drip, drip, drip, which became an ominous thump, *thump,* thump, *thump* of mismatched footfalls in my dreams. I started out of my sleep, sweating. And not until I had actually looked into the dimly-lit hall could I convince myself that it was only a vivid frightening dream.

Outside the renewed glare and strengthening drumbeats foretold another brewing storm, which, when it broke, completely obscured the struggling moon, thus throwing me into complete darkness except for the intermittent blinding flashes from the violent succeeding storm itself.

It was a ghoulish night with all that had gone before. I despaired of getting any substantial rest. But I finally dropped off again, with the lightning playing around me, and the revived skeletons clattering overhead.

Thump, *thump,* thump, *thump!* Again I started up, my heart pounding, only to find, when I got the courage to open the door, that it was just a dream, brought on, as before, by the still dripping eaves. Twice more this happened. And though I found the hall completely deserted each time, I couldn't dispel the shaky feeling that someone *had* been passing and repassing my door with muffled tread. It finally got on my nerves. To make certain that the key wouldn't be turned

on me in my sleep, as may have happened with the unfortunate actor, I tied it with a string to the doorknob. It could be moved slightly either way, but it couldn't be completely turned in its socket, or pushed out.

I thought now that I'd be able to sleep undisturbed till breakfast. But I was up again at three, this time literally paralyzed with fright. For the thing I had anticipated had happened—someone in the hall was actually working on the key from that end.

I could hear a faint but perceptible click, as some kind of an instrument—a special pair of pliers probably—probed the keyhole. And when I finally got to the door, with some slight help from the uncovered moon, and on as wabbly a pair of legs as any boy ever employed, I could feel the key give, first slightly one way, and then the other.

Who was it?—the tricky little innkeeper himself? Having failed to get me out of the room was he trying to get in now, while I slept, to get something he wanted here? That hardly seemed plausible. He had been in the room before to close the windows and could have gotten anything he wanted then—unless it was something I had with me. And if he was after something of mine, there was no object in his trying to move me to another room, for what I owned would have gone with me.

No, I quickly decided, it wasn't the innkeeper himself. More probably it was his wife, or that peg-legged man whom I had been dreaming about so persistently. The thought of either of them getting to me simply overwhelmed me. There was only one logical interpretation to put on the attempted entrance—it was a vile plot to do away with me, as the actor had been done away with.

I could have found out quickly who it was, and no doubt would have solved the entangling mystery then and there, by throwing open the door in the worker's face. But would *you* have done that?—unarmed, and knowing what you'd face? I doubt it.

It's one thing to be daring and quite another to be foolhardy. I knew, beyond all sensible doubt, that as soon as I opened that door that that would be the end of me. So I had no thought of opening it. To the contrary my chief concern was to see that it didn't open. I was as anxious as any to clear up the mystery but not in that way.

Yet I felt I ought to do something. But what?

Suppose I screamed, to scare the worker off, and then jumped out for a quick look at him before he got away. That might work. But suppose he didn't start off—suppose instead he just paddled his feet, to make it seem that he was running off, and then leaped, with killing intent, on me?

Not so good!

The safe play would be to come up quietly behind him to thus identify him and, if possible, even knock him out at his work. But plainly I couldn't do that myself. Even if I went out the window and down the vine I'd find myself locked out. I'd have to ring or pound for the sleepy innkeeper. And of course the instant this disturbance arose, the prowler would be off like a shadow.

There was only one practical course open to me—the phone! But that held few possibilities so far as the prowler's actual capture was concerned. If he had ears at all he would hear me talking. But I decided to try it, instructing the operator in a hollow whisper to ring the innkeeper below, as had been done the preceding night. And just as I expected, the instant my voice sounded, the clicking at the keyhole stopped.

"He doesn't answer," the operator told me, after what seemed a wait of years to me.

"Well, ring him again," I told her excitedly.

There was a renewed sharper click at the keyhole. As I grasped what it meant, my heart literally bounded into my throat. It was a last desperate attempt to get at me, to silence me, before I could get out word of what was going on.

"He still doesn't answer," the operator informed laconically.

I reached out and turned on a small stand lamp.

"Who are you calling?" I asked, my protruding eyes fixed on the jerking key.

"Landlord Rulens. That's who you wanted, isn't it?"

"Yes—but why doesn't he answer?"

"His phone may be out of order."

"Well, this is a swell time for that," I cried. "But keep on ringing him, or ring the constable or Dr. Arnoldson or somebody."

"He still doesn't answer," I was told, after another agonizing wait.

"Then get Dr. Arnoldson," I cried.

"I'm ringing him."

The string was giving now.

"Hurry!" I panted, horrified.

"I'm ringing him."

Then came the familiar voice I was waiting for!

"Hello," the word was spoken sleepily. "This is Dr. Arnoldson."

"Doctor!" I cried. "It's me—Poppy. Someone's trying to get into my room."

I could hear him catch his breath.

"Are you in danger, Poppy?" he asked quickly.

"Yes—it's that killer."

"Where's Rulens?"

"I can't get him. He doesn't answer. And maybe he can't."

"Good heavens! Well, hold out, Poppy, and Dory and I'll be there within five minutes."

Dropping the receiver then, I made a desperate lunge for the key, as the string broke. And there I crouched, gripping the key like death, till running feet in the street told of arriving help.

I was very close to a faint when Dr. Arnoldson and Dory finally got to me, having had to break a window to get in. Their excited pounding and persistent pressure on the night-bell button had brought not the slightest response from the usually alert innkeeper.

The awakened guests, with the recent sensational newspaper stories in mind, crowded the halls in their night-clothes, white-faced, expecting to hear of another tragedy. As before the summoned constable in turn got the excited sheriff, as it was learned that both the innkeeper and his wife had fled into the night, either to escape some dire peril themselves or to save themselves from the consequences of the crime of which they were suspected.

I fell in for close questioning. As coherently as possible I told first of the innkeeper's apparent attempt to move me, and then the panic that gradually gripped me as the belief fixed itself in my mind that someone was persistently coming to my locked door. The broken string bore out my story of the final desperate attempt to break in on me, and grave faces looked down at me in conclusion.

Dory kept close to me as the others ran

through the inn for possible clews bearing on the dual flight.

"Poppy, do you know what I'm going to do after this?" he told me, in that capable unflurried way of his.

"What?" I asked him weakly.

"I'm going to hang to you like a shadow. Wherever you go, boy, I'm going too. And I'm going to see if we can't get permission to carry a gun."

CHAPTER XVI

A PECULIAR WILL

WORD of the dual flight was flashed to the hungry newspapers, bringing in another rush of clamoring reporters and starting a renewed feverish quest for facts. But when the inquest resumed at the appointed time, with the usual curious followers, the chagrined sheriff could report only that the concluding witnesses were missing. They had run away during the night apparently taking only the clothes on their backs, but where they had gone to no one knew.

So the inquest was necessarily adjourned indefinitely, and thus the case stood when Dr. Arnoldson got us together in his office at ten-thirty.

"Tell me, Poppy," he went quickly into a discussion of the case, "was it still raining when you first detected those sounds at your keyhole?"

"No," I spoke after careful thought. "The moon was out. But I don't think it had been out very long. I kept getting up all night. And the room was dark till then."

"Then it's your opinion that the rain stopped about a quarter of three—is that right?"

"Yes—somewhere around there. But why?"

"Well, you were partly of the idea that it was

Rulens' wife at your door. If it had been we would have found her footprints, with his, after the rain. It's pretty well established that they went out the back way and hurried off afoot. But there were no tracks—proof in itself that they left *in* the rain, or before, but not after it. So it couldn't have been either of them at your door. See my point?"

"Then you think it was that peg-legged man?" I asked, shivering at the memory of it.

"Possibly—or our old friend the monkey poisoner."

"Do you know what I think?" Dory put in, in his impetuous way.

"What?" his uncle asked.

"I think there's someone hiding over there."

Dr. Arnoldson smiled blandly.

"I thought, Dory, you were going to give us an original theory, and I was all prepared to get excited over it. For don't you realize, my boy," he continued gravely, "that we've been over there searching for hours with exactly that thought in mind? I know that cobwebby cellar by heart, and every nook and cranny of the place clear to the attic. But for all we found we might just as well have saved ourselves the effort. However, I have uncovered some interesting facts about the innkeeper himself. I think I know now what brought about the trouble between the two brothers."

"You said it was over some property," Dory reminded.

"Yes, but that was just hearsay. Now I *know* that Antone Rulens got the lion's share of his father's estate. The sheriff asked me to help him go through some private papers over there for possible clews bearing on the mystery. Among the papers was a memorandum showing just how the property was divided. Also we found a copy of the original will."

"Did the innkeeper take more than he was entitled to?" Dory asked.

"No, Dory—it isn't that. But the will was peculiarly drawn up. Each of the brothers received a third at the time of the father's death. The other third was placed in Antone's trust for a period of ten years."

"Who got it then?"

"He did—finally. That's what caused the trouble, I think, for Emil Rulens, no doubt, felt that he should have had half of it even if he hadn't behaved himself. The sheriff agrees with me that this probably is what brought him here. Evidently he intended to force a more favorable settlement from his brother. Had he failed, there's no telling what might have happened there, for almost anything could have been expected from a man of his vicious type. But whatever his plans were, they were cut off by his own tragic death."

"Almost everybody thinks Mrs. Rulens did it," Dory commented.

"Yes, I know," Dr. Arnoldson nodded gravely. "I thought so myself for a while. But I'm beginning to have my doubts about that now. The whole tangled case too obviously revolves around Poppy. Everything else seems incidental. We may learn in time that the innkeeper and his wife had absolutely nothing to do with the crime, but were merely caught in the web of circumstances."

"If that's the case, why did they run away?" Dory asked, puzzled.

"Rulens never did have much backbone. If he actually believed that his wife was guilty, as would seem from his talk with Poppy, he may have taken that course to try and save her."

"And you say they went off afoot, Uncle Karl?"

"Yes—their car is still in the garage."

"Then they can't be many miles from here."

"The sheriff thinks they're hiding in the hills around Whispering Towers."

Dory laughed.

"Maybe they've joined up with old Kegg himself."

"More probably they'll be found in some cave," surmised Dr. Arnoldson. "For Antone roamed through that section a lot when he was a boy."

"But who's going to run the inn?" Dory asked.

"It'll have to run itself, I guess, or close up. Still I dare say the help can get along for a few

days, and by that time the owners probably will be back to take charge themselves. For even if they should be arraigned for trial, they can get out on bail, and thus go about their work as usual."

"Did you say, Uncle Karl, that the inn used to be the old Rulens homestead?"

"Yes. It was built by Manton Rulens, the innkeeper's father, who came to this country from Bohemia in the seventies. I remember him well —a swarthy hairy-looking man. He had a blacksmith shop on a back street, which was a big attraction to the boys in those days. He did extensive fine carriage work, too, and built up quite a business. It was sold after he died. According to the will I saw he left about ten thousand dollars in stocks and bonds too. Antone got the homestead, which he later moved to the street and converted into an inn, and Emil took his share in securities, which probably soon slipped through his fingers. But that trust fund is what puzzles me. There must have been a reason for it, yet it all went to Antone in the end."

"Just what is a trust fund anyway, Uncle Karl?"

"Well, Dory, if your father left you his property in my bonded charge, that would be a trust fund. You'd never be able to draw on the principal yourself, nor me either, unless provision for that had been made in the will. But all the money that the fund earned, under my administra-

tion, would go to you, except my own expenses. In this particular case it was specified that the entire amount of the trust fund was to advert to Antone at the end of ten years. But what was the object of the fund? And who, during the ten-year period, got the benefit of it?"

"The innkeeper knows."

"Yes," said Dr. Arnoldson, "but where's the innkeeper?"

"Do you think this has any bearing on the mystery, Uncle Karl?"

"Only as it may have caused trouble between the twin brothers. But I find it curious nonetheless."

"I suppose you'll laugh at me, Dr. Arnoldson," I then advanced a theory of my own, "but I've been wondering if the monkey that put those marks on the actor's throat doesn't really belong over there. That would explain how the inn got its queer name."

Dr. Arnoldson laughed, evidently not greatly impressed by my theory.

"A green monkey, Poppy?"

"Well, maybe not absolutely green—but some kind of a monkey, hidden away."

"I wish we could find one there," he spoke thoughtfully. "It certainly would simplify the case. But after the time I spent there and the thoroughness with which the sheriff and I went through the place, I'm rather inclined to believe,

Poppy, that it's a vain theory. I wouldn't attach much importance to it if I were you."

"But why did the innkeeper try to get me out of that room?" I puzzled.

"There's no question but what Rulens and his wife are in possession of certain hidden facts that would help materially in clearing up the case if those facts were generally known. For it doesn't stand to reason that a peg-legged man could have been in their inn two nights running—granting that it *was* he who disturbed you last night—without them knowing something about it. And that probably, as much as the actual crime itself, is what so upset Mrs. Rulens. She isn't the type to give up that way without some compelling cause."

"But if she was as ill as she let on, how did she get away?" I asked.

"She could have gotten up, if she saw escape ahead. That would stimulate her. Or she may have been acting to a certain extent."

"Do you think that when the landlord talked with me he already had made up his mind to run away?"

"Probably. And if he was conscious of some particular peril that he was leaving behind—but I'm not thinking of a green monkey, Poppy!—that may have explained why he wanted you to move to what he considered a less dangerous room."

"But why should that room be so dangerous?" I puzzled.

"Maybe on account of the vine," Dory offered his idea.

"I think myself," Dr. Arnoldson concurred gravely, "that it was the vine. He was afraid of what might come in there, in spite of his extra screen hooks. But instead, the danger came from within."

"And do you think, Uncle Karl, that someone did actually bring the dead monkey there, on a ladder, as the coroner said?"

"Most assuredly not. For yesterday I searched thoroughly for ladder marks myself. I even went over the ground with a magnifying glass. There wasn't the slightest evidence that a ladder had stood there."

"Well," drawled Dory, in his set way, "I can't get the idea out of my head that there's someone hiding over there. So I think I'll do a little systematic searching myself, when we get through here."

CHAPTER XVII

BARRED WINDOWS

"Did I understand you to say, Dory," asked Dr. Arnoldson, as we further talked over matters in his office, "that you and Poppy are going to double up from now on, for his safety?"

"Sure," grinned Dory, as he stretched his big limbs, "meals and all. He's going to pay for everything."

"Which suits me," I told him cheerfully.

"Well," commented Dr. Arnoldson, with a reflective nod, "I think that's a pretty good idea myself. But don't do anything rash, boys. You better put a bolt on the inside of your door too, and possibly some more hooks on those screens."

"How about some iron bars for the windows?" Dory nonsensically suggested.

"Well, you may wish you had them at that," Dr. Arnoldson spoke enigmatically.

"How about a revolver, Uncle Karl?"

"You'll have to see the sheriff about that. If he gives his consent, I can fix you up. But for heaven's sake watch where you're aiming, and don't shoot each other."

Dory took pretended aim at the office window.

"Bang! Bang!" he cried boisterously. "There

goes the monkey! Did you see it fall, Poppy? I shot it through the gizzard."

"I never handled a revolver myself," I confessed to him. "So maybe we better go out in the country and practice up."

"Country nothin'," he rumbled. "What have we got a doorknob in our room for?"

"Good heavens!" cried Dr. Arnoldson. "I think I had better go over there myself."

"And why not, Uncle Karl?" Dory quickly picked up the suggestion. "You can hire the room across the hall. If the keyhole guy comes back, you can pop him one with a pop bottle."

"That might not be such a wild idea at that," Dr. Arnoldson considered. "So don't be surprised if you see a feeble whiskered old man going in and out there around dinner-time to-night. And let's see—what name shall we give him?"

"Professor Icabod Hoofenpepper," Dory suggested, grinning.

"I think plain James W. Banks of Cincinnati will be better," the intended detective decided.

"I wish you'd been there last night with a pop bottle," I told him.

"Yes," he nodded, "I do myself. That undoubtedly would have meant the complete clearing up of the mystery then and there. But we'll see what we can do to-night."

"And you're really going to wear false whiskers, Uncle Karl?" Dory asked, amused.

"All my life," Dr. Arnoldson confessed boyishly, "I've been wanting to disguise myself in true detective fashion. To-night that desire will be gratified. So look for James W. Banks of Cincinnati around the dinner hour."

"It's room number eleven," I told him, "in case you didn't know it."

"Yes," he nodded, "I noticed the number when I was there."

The constable came in then.

"Say, Doc," he spoke earnestly, "can you spare a little more time from your pills, to help me with this confounded monkey case?"

Dr. Arnoldson gestured open-handed.

"The pills are completely forgotten, Neil. So name your problem."

"Well, I've just uncovered some more monkey business—if you can imagine such a thing possible, after all that's gone before."

Dr. Arnoldson's eyes danced.

"More monkey business, eh? That's interesting. Take this chair and tell us all about it."

"No, I can't sit down now," the constable demurred. "For I've got an old man coming here in a minute or two. But I thought I better run in ahead of him to make sure that you could see us."

"An old man?—who?" Dr. Arnoldson asked curiously.

"Patsy O'Toole—you know him, don't you?"

"Old Patsy?—sure, I know him well. But what's he got to do with the case?"

"Well, he heard the testimony yesterday about the monkey, and he's been talking monkeys himself ever since. The neighbors tipped me off. So I thought I'd drop in on him this morning and see what it was all about—for he used to work for old Manton Rulens, you know, in the carriage shop. It's his story—and if this doesn't put a crimp in your wits I don't know what could! —that the Rulens themselves used to keep a monkey in their attic."

"No!" Dr. Arnoldson stared, dumfounded. "Is that a fact, Neil?"

"Yes,—according to old Patsy. But here he comes now—you get the story out of him yourself, and see what you can make of it."

All eyes were on the door when it opened, admitting a typical old Irishman, wrinkled and stooped, and apparently much exercised over this demand on him by the law.

"Now I hain't a-sayin'," he piped immediately, his eyes moving among us nervously, as he took a seat, "that the monkey I barred in the attic is the same one that this here lad saw at his windy night before last. But when I heerd about that at the inquest, an' how everybody was sayin' whose monkey was it an' where did it come from, I says to me ould woman—mebbe, I says, it's ould Manton's monkey. Mebbe, I says, it never was

killed at all an' buried with him, as was said at the time, but mebbe that young scallawag of an Antone—an' sure I never did have any faith in *him,* the tricky little scamp, tiptoein' in an' out of his pa's shop an' takin' tools he had no right to an' lettin' the blame fall on his brother!—mebbe, I says, he's bin keepin' the monkey hid all these years, jest to do his brother with in the end—though I hain't a-sayin' now, mind ye, that it *is* the positive same monkey, or that Antone did keep it fur that. I don't want ye to misunderstand me, nor git me in any trouble with the law. I'm jest tellin' ye what I know an' ye kin draw your own conclusions."

"Well, this certainly is a big surprise to us," Dr. Arnoldson spoke bewilderedly. "We all thought that the monkey possibilities of the case were just about exhausted. Now you come along with an account of an entirely new monkey. And you say it was old Manton Rulens'?"

"Yes, sor," the Irishman nodded vigorously. "An' from the day he turned it loose in his attic, after sendin' me over there to bar all the windys so it couldn't get out, he was a changed man. An' he stayed changed, with more weight showin' on his mind every month, till the hour of his death, when the bars was taken down—Antone did that—an' they said, sor, at the time, that the monkey was killed an' buried with him, but I'm a-doubtin' that now. I think Antone kept it hid

fur jest this purpose. But, mind ye now, I hain't a-sayin' it positive."

Dr. Arnoldson referred to a small memorandum book in which he kept a variety of notes.

"Mr. O'Toole," he asked, "were you still working for Manton Rulens at the time of his death in 1920?"

"That I was, sor."

"And wasn't it about two years before that—in the fall of the year—when you first noticed the change in him that you just mentioned?"

"In October, sor—you're right."

"Do you know what caused the change?"

"Well, I always said it was him gittin' that monkey, sor, but there was some other talk about a friend of his gittin' kicked by a horse."

"Kicked?—how?"

"That I can't say, sor. But your father could tell ye, were he here. Fur I heerd at the time he was called in."

"I'll look that up—for I still have my father's records. And now for a few final questions about that monkey, Mr. O'Toole. You say Manton Rulens kept it in his attic?"

"Yes, sor."

"Did you ever see it?"

"No, but one night when the windys was open I heerd it."

"Chattering?"

"Yes, an' screechin', sor—most hideously.

Sure it made the hair stand up all over me head."

"But you never actually saw it yourself?"

"No, sor."

"Do you know of anyone who did see it?"

"Only ould Manton, sor, an' his family."

"Did any of them ever tell you that there was a monkey in their attic?"

"No, sor. But hain't I jest been after tellin' ye?—I heerd it myself."

"What makes you so sure it was a monkey?"

"Because afterwards I heerd that same screechin' chatterin' sound in a baboon's cage at a circus. It couldn't have bin nothin' but a monkey, sor."

"I see. And so, when the bars were taken down right after Mr. Rulens' death, you and probably some others who had been conjecturing on the affair, jumped to the conclusion that the monkey had been killed and buried with its master. Isn't that right?"

"Well, I haven't no proof, sor, but you can't fool me on what I hear with me own ears. It was a monkey—a baboon of some sort, like that one at the circus—an' if it wasn't buried with ould Manton it was put away soon after."

"When were the bars put on the attic windows?—shortly after Rulens' friend was injured by the horse?"

"Yes, sor—that same month."

Dory went off to the inn, at the conclusion of the meeting, to see what he could uncover there,

while I helped Dr. Arnoldson go through his father's old record cards, on one of which we found the following notations:

> Oct. 12th. Called at midnight to attend skull injury case at Manton Rulens'. Stranger, about 45. Unconscious when I left, may require trephining. Rather mysterious affair, I thought, from actions of those around particularly M. R. himself. Name of John Jones given. Some friend of family. Injury laid to kick from horse. Could have happened in fight.
> Oct. 13. Patient at Rulens' still unconscious.
> Oct. 14. Patient at Rulens' moved by them to Madison without my knowledge. Hear operation will be performed, but case is out of my hands. Very mysterious all through. M. R. shows great strain.

"What do you make of it?" I asked Dr. Arnoldson.

"Simply this, Poppy: There probably never was a monkey in Manton Rulens's attic, as the gossips reported, our friend O'Toole included. But I think this injured man, whoever he was, was confined there, after an unsatisfactory operation in Madison. This happened in October, 1918. It was in October, 1918 that Manton Rulens made his peculiar will, showing that he felt him-

self responsible for the man's probably unbalanced condition, for it would look to me now as though he was the one who benefited by the trust fund we were just discussing."

I went back to read the name from the record card.

"John Jones," I read. "Sounds like a phony name."

"Yes, my father evidently thought so at the time. But if it was a fictitious name, what was the man's real name?—how was he actually injured?—and what became of him after Manton Rulens' death?"

CHAPTER XVIII

NEW THEORIES

"WELL, what did you discover?" I asked Dory.

"Cobwebs," he growled, disgusted. "And you?"

I told him of the notations on the office record card and his uncle's deductions.

"A madman, huh? Does Uncle Karl think the man's still alive somewhere?"

"He didn't say, but that may be the case."

Dory's eyes widened.

"Holy mackerel!" he exploded. "Do you think we've been working this case from the wrong end?"

"How so?" I asked quickly.

"We've been going on the theory that Emil Rulens came here to gouge his tricky brother, or get revenge. But it may be that the brothers together cheated the other guy, whoever he is, and it's *him* that's hanging around here for vengeance."

The girl waiting on us seemed amused by our excitement.

"You must be talking about that monkey," she shrugged uncomfortably.

"And how are you getting along without a boss?" I asked her.

"Oh, terrible!" she showed her disgust over the apparent disorganization. "And if they don't get back pretty soon I'm going to quit. For I never agreed to run the place."

"Were you surprised when they ran off?" I asked, to see what she'd say.

"No," she replied bluntly. "Mr. Rulens himself is a pussyfoot. And if his wife *did* do it, he made her—you wait and see."

"Do you think she really was sick yesterday?"

"Well, if she wasn't she put up a good pretense."

"I don't suppose you recall the innkeeper's father," I followed up.

"Old Manton? Yes, I have a slight recollection of him. But don't get the idea, Sherlock, that I was taking a post-graduate course in college when he started his carriage factory. I'm not quite that old."

That amused Dory.

"Aren't you Mrs. Noah, from the ark?" he joked.

"No, nor Mrs. Eve either. But why did you ask me about old Manton?" she wanted to know.

"A friend of his was kicked on the head by a horse," I told her. "I wondered if you knew anything about it."

Her eyes were dancing now.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "Was it you?"

This time I thought Dory would split.

The girl started off with a tray, but wheeled, with a stifled scream, when a spoon fell behind her, which showed how unnerved everybody in the place was.

"Well," resumed Dory, when we were alone, "what do you think about it, Poppy? Do you think that crazy guy really is hiding around here, to bump off the innkeeper?"

"I never suspected we were dealing with a madman," I returned reflectively. "But that's about the only way you can explain some of the things that have happened here. So I wouldn't be a bit surprised that you're right."

He put on airs.

"Brains will tell," he bragged.

"We've been wondering," I went back into the tangle, "why anybody should steal a dead monkey. But that wouldn't be at all surprising for a madman—or the poisoning either."

"No," concurred Dory, "nor his taking that dead monkey up a ladder."

"But your uncle says there wasn't a ladder."

"Piffle! Uncle Karl doesn't know everything. I bet a cookie I could go up a ladder out there without him finding any trace of it. And this explains about the innkeeper and his wife skinning out—they did it to save their own lives.

That's why he was so anxious about you. Why, everything dovetails to a 'T.'"

"All except one thing," I thoughtfully pointed out.

"And what's that?"

"The peg-legged man."

"Well, maybe that's the guy we're after."

"Then how about the man in the meat market? I'd sooner think he's the guy."

The girl came back with our coffee and dessert.

"Well," she joked, "have you decided which of you it was that got kicked on the head?"

"What do you think?" I asked her.

"I think it was two mules," she laughed, dividing her eyes between us, "and that you both got kicked."

"Ouch!" grimaced Dory.

We drove out toward Whispering Towers that afternoon, where we practiced for an hour with Dr. Arnoldson's revolver, the sheriff having decided, in view of the very evident attempts on my life, that I was entitled to this protection.

Old Kegg and his bodyguard came along in a big car while we were there, Jans driving. They were headed for town. Later we met them going back. Dory waved, in his reckless way, but all he got in return was a stony glowering stare.

John W. Banks arrived on the five-thirty bus, getting out feebly, with much nervous fussing

over his bags. Nor could we believe, till we actually had seen the name in the register, that it was Dory's clever uncle.

Following dinner, Dory began to hint broadly about another trip to Madison. As there was nothing to keep us in Rockcliff we got Kak at seven and started out, stopping at Dory's home on the way in to pick up possible mail from his father, but disappointedly finding none.

"Where did those actors say they were playing?" he asked, when we stopped down town.

"At the Orpheum."

"Well, let's see what their act is like—shall we?"

"Yes, let's," Kak spiritedly endorsed the suggestion.

The show ran through with no sign of the four actors. And when we later asked the manager about them he stared blankly, telling us he never had heard of them.

"What do you make of that, Poppy?" asked Dory, when we were outside.

"It looks like they lied," I commented, "or else I made a mistake in the theater."

"Well, let's drive around to some of the other theaters and inquire," he suggested. "If those birds lied I want to know about it. It may be important."

It was made plain to us, in conclusion, that the actors had indeed lied about their Madison en-

gagement. But for what purpose? It was our belief now that a madman had committed the crime. Could it be possible, we considered, bewildered, that the associates of the dead man were somehow involved in the affair too?

"I bet a cookie we're locked out," growled Dory, as we passed the darkened inn on our way to Kak's house.

"What time is it?" she asked anxiously.

"Twelve-thirty," I told her.

"Oh, mercy! What mother won't tell her little daughter to-night!"

A tousle-headed boy appeared finally to let us in, sleepily locking up after us.

There was a slight sound from the opposite room when we unlocked our door, which was the way James W. Banks took of letting us know that he was watching over us. And wondering what new developments, or possible perils, would come with the diminishing night, I quickly got myself ready for bed, with Dory, and dropped almost instantly to sleep.

With my new chum and his uncle there, and the new bolt on the door, I felt as safe as I ever had anywhere.

Suddenly, as on that other memorable night, I was awakened by a scratching sound at the window. And when I started up, agape, my heart thumping, there to my unbounded dumfoundment was that crazy frozen-faced grinning mon-

key again! I shook Dory, who came up gurgling, and I then made a bound for the window. But in just that short elapsed time the monkey had vanished.

"Oh, I bet you imagined it," growled Dory, when I finally got him awake.

I began to think I had, when we could find no sign of a ladder below. It was ridiculous to conclude that a madman could have moved a ladder and dead monkey off that quick.

And yet I knew I hadn't imagined it.

"Do you suppose," I asked Dory, "that the monkey came from above?"

"How?" he yawned.

"Well, on a rope—from the roof."

"And shall we go up there and find out?" he suggested eagerly.

"Suffering cats—*no*! But I tell you what I am going to do—I'm going outside and watch."

"All right then," he was as willing for that plan as the other, "let's go."

Dressing, we let ourselves quietly into the hall, the opposite door at the same time opening slightly.

"What's the matter?" came a guarded whisper.

"We're going out to watch for the monkey," Dory whispered in return.

"I'd rather you stayed in your room," came anxiously.

"Poppy thinks now someone's letting it down from the roof."

"Did you see it again?"

"He did."

"When?"

"A few minutes ago."

"Well, keep together. And for heaven's sake use your wits."

"We've got a lot to tell you, Uncle Karl."

"About what?"

"Those actors. We learned to-night they never went to Madison at all. They lied about that."

"Well, you better go on now," we were advised uneasily. "I'll watch here till you get back."

Our tiptoed passage down the stairs, and out, gave me an eerie feeling—as though any instant something was liable to leap at us. Then, in the shadows, within sight of the four vine-framed windows, we crouched motionless to watch.

If you've never waited for something like that, at that lonely hour, you can't fully imagine how shivery it was for us. I don't think I could have done it alone, after all that had gone before. But there was something about Dory that stiffened one's own courage. I doubt if anything could have frightened him.

The feeble moon laced through the thin clouds. Occasional passing trucks broke the silence.

From a stream near by came the dismal croak of frogs. An owl hooted mournfully.

Suddenly above these scattered sounds came a new one—the unmistakable pat of running feet. Someone was coming from in back of the inn.

I could feel Dory's hand go stiffly to the gun in his hip pocket. Then his arm relaxed, as amazement gripped him. For the appearing runner wasn't the expected madman at all, nor the peg-legged man, but a mere boy.

It was the little Chinese boy from Whispering Towers—Fu Wong Pu!

He came with a positive sense of direction to a spot directly below my windows where he felt around quickly for the main stem of the roving vine and then started up nimbly, so much like a monkey himself in his movements that Dory and I literally crouched aghast.

The vine gave perilously when he was halfway up, and then loosened altogether, throwing him down heavily on his back. At the same instant the two silent-footed oily-skinned head-hunters glidingly pounced on him, out of the shadows, a snaky black hand going quickly to his mouth to stifle all cries, as they took him and started off.

Dory was out like a shot.

"Hey, you!" he bellowed, in that fearless sweeping way of his. "Drop that kid! What do you think this is anyway—your birthday?"

The savages wheeled, startled. And then of

one accord they came at him, knives gleaming dully in the wan moonlight.

"Oh, so you want a fight, huh?" he further bellowed. "Well, I'll give you all the fight you want. So come on with your dime-store knives, you white-livered cowards—and I'll fight the both of you bare-handed."

"I'll take one of them," I panted at his elbow.

"Well, look out, Poppy, that they don't knife you. They're a sneaking pair."

With that he rushed the leader, sending him back shrieking with a well directed kick in the stomach.

"How do you like that, Shinola?" he bellowed. "That's a little trick we worked out here in America. Thought you'd like to carry my head around for a watch-charm, huh? Well, they'll be making mincemeat pie out of you, brother, when I get through with you—if they can find enough pieces to chop up."

The second savage had stopped undecided, at the unexpected attack on the first. And evidently concluding now that he'd get the worst of it, he turned to run, but tripped on the fallen vine.

I was on him in a flash, pinning him down with my knees, and probably would have had him pommeled to sleep in another minute or two if something hadn't suddenly descended on my own skull with deadening effect.

Following which all was a blank.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE DUNGEON

I CAME out of what seemed a wild disorganized dream to find myself trussed up on a cold stone floor with Dory in the same fix beside me, calling to me in the dark.

"Poppy!" he nudged me with his shoulder. "Wake up."

"I am awake," I told him dizzily.

"Old Kegg's got us locked up in a dungeon, Poppy."

"Old Kegg?" I spoke wonderingly.

"Yes. It was him who knocked us out, at the inn."

"And did you get knocked out too?"

"Yes—but I guess my skull's thicker than yours, or I got a lighter tap from the butt of his revolver. For I came to in the car."

"What car?" I asked wonderingly.

I still couldn't think straight. There was too much of a thumping in my head.

"Why, the car that brought us to Whispering Towers, of course—old Kegg's car. Didn't I just tell you? He's got us locked up in a dungeon, after dumping us into his car in town and bringing us here tied up."

"What's he going to do with us?" I spoke anxiously.

"Bump us off maybe—if he thinks we know too much."

'Oh, no!" I cried, horrified.

"Well," Dory added dryly, "I didn't hear him ordering any tea and biscuits for us this time—I can tell you that much."

"Is the little Chinese boy here too?" I spoke lower.

"No, they locked him up some place else, I guess—to keep us from quizzing him. He knows the whole works, whatever it is. It looks to me like he came to town to-night purposely to tell you about it. He certainly was heading for your window when they got him."

"Where was the captain?" I puzzled. "I never noticed him there."

"Out in the alley in his car—till the fight started."

"Boy!" I groaned. "He sure did plenty to my head. It feels like a buzz saw had been working on it."

"Yes, I saw him strike you. Then the whole three of them closed in on me. But move over a little bit so I can get at those wrist ropes of yours. Maybe I can pick the knots. I can still use my fingers."

He worked silently for several minutes, but with no success.

"Boy!—if we only had a knife," he spoke longingly.

"I've got one," I told him quickly.

"Yes, you *think* you've got one," he snorted.

"What's the matter?—did they take it away from me?"

"Sure. They frisked us both—they got all your money too, and the gun."

"Well, they're welcome to the money," I spoke indifferently, "if we can get out of here."

"You ought to see the place, Poppy—talk about a *prison*! It's even got an iron door."

"Where is it?—down in the ground?"

"Yes—they carried us through that big room where we had the tea and biscuits and down a flight of stone stairs, with the captain thumping along ahead with a lantern. Then they dumped us in here and locked the door."

"It seems like a dream," I spoke wonderingly.

"Well, shove your feet up here and let me see what I can do with the knots there. It'll help if we can just free our feet."

"How are you coming?" I asked presently.

"Not so good," he confessed, disappointed.

"Shall I try yours?"

"If you want to."

I was still working on the stubborn knots when a slight click near us warned us that someone, outside our door, was guardedly unlocking it.

We could hear the door swing open. But there was no light, as we expected.

"Fu Wong very much like to know if honorable Poppy Ott and most worthy son of honorable detective are present?" a familiar voice spoke ceremoniously in the dark.

"Over here," Dory cried quickly.

An instant later the boy was beside us.

"Got a knife?" Dory asked.

"Small boy, like assassin, very often carry knife in garment but with much more worthy purpose," was the long-winded reply.

"Well, if you've got one, for Pete's sake use it and quit yapping about it," Dory spoke impatiently. "We're tied hand and foot."

"Fu Wong very happy to proceed."

Our bonds having been cut, with quick deft strokes, we got quickly to our feet.

"Now show us the way out of here," Dory spoke eagerly.

But the Chinese boy stood quietly in the dark.

"Fu Wong most humbly make request of American boys to help him overpower brutal impostor with peg-leg."

"Who do you mean?—old Kegg?" Dory asked.

"Captain Kegg most splendid gentleman in good temper and most worthy benefactor of grateful little Chinese boy, but now in very much trouble."

"What in Sam Hill do you want us to do?"

Dory asked bewilderedly. "Can't you say it in English?"

"Let me talk to him," I put in.

"And who do you *think* you are?—Confucius?"

I pushed him aside.

"What is it, Fu Wong?" I asked quickly. "What do you want us to help you do?"

"Overpower very brutal impostor with peg-leg."

"You don't mean Captain Kegg?"

"Captain Kegg very noble benefactor—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about that," I impatiently cut him off. "Is there someone else here with a peg-leg?"

"Very brutal impostor whose evil hirelings make prisoner of Fu Wong in cabin in woods."

"Now do you know?" chuckled Dory.

"Keep still," I told him. "And when did brutal impostor's very evil hirelings make prisoner of you in the woods?" I asked the strange boy.

"Fu Wong present greetings from great captain to honorable Poppy Ott at inn, with request that Poppy Ott proceed to Whispering Towers to have head cut off by indignant captain. And evil hirelings waylay Fu Wong on way to Tower with Poppy Ott's regrets to great captain."

"You mean," I cried, "that someone caught

you, when you were going home on your bicycle, and imprisoned you in an old cabin?"

"Fu Wong most unfortunately fall into evil hirelings' hands, and then very fortunately escape to-night to learn of good captain's misfortune."

"What do you make of it?" I asked Dory helplessly.

"Chop-suey," he grunted.

"But he says there are two men here with peg-legs. Isn't that right, Fu Wong?"

"Most honorable Poppy Ott make statement very correctly."

"One is the captain," I said. "But who's the other?"

"Very brutal impostor, who bring misfortune to this very happy home."

"And who was it followed you to town to-night?—the captain or the other man?"

"Very brutal impostor, who follow Fu Wong in great haste with evil hirelings so honorable Poppy Ott may not be informed of great captain's misfortune."

"Well, now we're getting somewhere," Dory spoke excitedly. "For that's plain enough for anybody. The bird who socked us to-night at the inn wasn't Captain Kegg at all but—"

"Brutal impostor," I supplied, "whose evil hirelings—"

"Oh, shut up!" Dory squawked in disgust. "You don't eat rice with chopsticks."

"But where is this very brutal impostor?" I turned to Fu Wong. "And what's he doing here?"

"Fu Wong very much have suspicion that brutal impostor make evil plans to rob gracious captain and draw money from bank."

"And where's the captain?" I continued excitedly. "Have they got him shut up some place?"

"Gracious captain very much helpless in locked chamber with key in brutal impostor's garment."

"Did his servants turn against him?"

"Servants very much helpless in same fix."

"You mean they're all locked up?—the head-hunters too?"

"All very much helpless in locked rooms."

"Dory!" I cried. "Do you get that? There's a gang of robbers here. Those weren't the real head-hunters that we fought to-night at the inn at all, but fakes. There's someone here with a peg-leg, too, made up like the captain. And it was *him* that I saw in the inn."

"Yes," Dory drawled mockingly, "isn't it swell to get it all cleared up!"

"Boy!—I wish we had that gun. We'd go up and capture the whole gang."

"How about some clubs?" Dory asked Fu Wong eagerly.

"Very much supply of fine clubs in fuel cellar," the boy replied.

"All right then—lead us to it."

"Honorable friend will pop very brutal impostor on head with club?" the boy asked eagerly.

"Yes, Shanghai, honorable friend will pop very brutal impostor on head with very much big pop—if he gets a chance. You can depend on that."

"Very much excellent!" the boy showed his satisfaction. "And honorable Poppy Ott will pop fake natives on head at same time?"

"Sure," I told him quickly, "if you'll just get us the clubs, we'll do the popping."

After what *I* got on the head, I was itching to pay it back to somebody with interest.

We started then for the fuel cellar to arm ourselves, but stopped in our tracks when a deep despairing groan came out of the darkness ahead.

"What's that?" I asked Fu Wong, as I felt my hair going up.

"Very much perfect testimony of great captain's misfortune."

"Is that the captain?"

"Our passage to fuel cellar proceeds past barred door where great captain deplore misery of unjust capture with loud lament."

"Don't you have any matches or candles in this crazy place?" growled Dory, as he stumbled along in the dark.

"Only foolish mouse travels with lantern among watchful cats," the boy replied.

"Well, for cat's sake don't take the wrong turn and fall into a well, or something."

The aged prisoner groaned again as we passed his grated door in the dark, arriving finally at the fuel cellar where we properly armed ourselves, and started back, our guide drawing us quickly into a sheltered niche when a door opened above us.

There was a murmur of voices, wholly unintelligible to Dory and me, but perfectly distinguishable to the remarkable Chinese boy.

"Evil hirelings very much scared," he told us, "that village policemen come here with search for American boys. One hireling say, we should make much distance from here before the cops make arrival. And another hireling say, yes, we should make great distance from here before like fish we get caught in police net. But the very brutal impostor tell them in voice of command—no! There is much great fortune hidden in castle, he make comment with hirelings. And now very determined he is coming down alone to force unhappy captain to make disclosure of hiding place. Which give us very good chance to pop him on head."

I could feel Dory grinning in the dark.

"Fu Wong," he declared, "you're a brick."

"Worthy son of honorable detective very much like brick too," was the pleased boy's reply.

"I tell you how we'll work it," I spoke quickly. "And we can get the whole gang too."

"How?" Dory asked eagerly.

"Well, we'll let the leader go into the captain's chamber—see? Then we'll wait outside the door. When he comes out, we'll sock him."

"With very violent pop on head," Fu Wong supplied spiritedly.

"Yes," I grinned, "with very violent pop on head. For, boy!—he's the bird who popped me. And do *I* want revenge!"

"And then what?" Dory asked.

"We'll wait for one of the others to come down, and pop him on the head in the same way —with very violent pop."

"But suppose no one else comes?"

"They're bound to in time, if the leader doesn't show up. They'll want to know what's the matter with him—never suspecting that he's been popped on the head—with very violent pop."

"Say, that's right. That's a swell scheme, Poppy. It's a wonder I didn't think of it myself. And we'll let Fu Wong in on the final pop, huh?"

"Why not on all of them?"

"Honorable Poppy Ott make very sensible suggestion," the boy spoke gleefully.

"All right," Dory laughed softly. "Majority rules. You're in on every pop, Fu Wong. But be careful you don't pop one of us instead."

"Fu Wong, in warm gratitude, pop with very great care," he promised.

Arriving with his swinging lantern at the foot of the stone stairs, the peg-legged leader came on, till he reached the door of the prisoner's chamber, a few yards from us.

"Is that the man you saw in the hall?" whispered Dory, as the grated iron door was unlocked and opened.

"That's him," I declared. "But he looks older now."

"Evidently," surmised Dory, "he made himself up from that same picture that Uncle Karl has in his scrapbook. But after he got here, and saw how much older the captain looked, he changed his make-up accordingly."

"But who can he be?" I puzzled.

"Say, Poppy!" Dory spoke excitedly. "You don't suppose it's one of those actors?"

"Jumpin' Jupiter! Of *course* it is. There were four of them, you know. And there's four men here."

"But how about the peg-leg? I didn't see a peg-leg on any of them."

"Well, I'm not going to puzzle my head over that now. I know it's those actors. I bet Emil Rulens was going to be in on it too. In fact, I bet you he started it, and got the gang together for just that purpose. They never intended to go to Madison at all. They intended to come

here and take charge and steal everything in sight. When we saw them going to town in the car, I bet all they went for was to draw money out of the bank. You wait and see."

"Boy!—what a plot," Dory spoke wonderingly. "And it might have worked too, if it hadn't been for old chop-suey here. But I wonder how long they've been here?"

"They probably closed in on the captain the night after the inquest."

"Where were his guards?"

"Well, I don't pretend to know how they did it, but they did. They certainly have the upper hand here now."

As the conversation that began in the prisoner's chamber arose to an excited peak, with the captor threatening death to the captive if he didn't disclose the hiding place of his reported fortune and the latter thundering defiance, we tiptoed out, firmly gripping our clubs, and got in position at the door.

"Listen, Captain," came the final deadly threat, "we're going to pull out of here in a few hours, for it's getting a mite too hot for us—thanks to those meddlesome boys! But when we go, either your money goes with us or you'll be left behind full of lead. So take your choice. I'm going up now to get my men. But I'll be back in ten minutes. So think it over. If you want to get any more pleasure out of this crazy castle

of yours, you better think right—that's all I've got to say to you, big boy."

With that he came out, swinging his lantern, and *boy*!—down came three nice thick fat clubs with perfect aim. He went down like a log, the captain gasping within as he watched. Then the relieved old man sat in his irons chuckling—for he was chained to the wall—as we similarly knocked out the others, one after another.

CHAPTER XX

THE ATTIC'S SECRET

It was a sorry-looking lot of thieves that Dory and I brought to town that morning in Captain Kegg's big car. The two "head-hunters" begged sheepishly for their clothes. But they were thrown into jail just as they were, where they became the object of rising ridicule as more of their blacking wore off, letting the natural color of their skin show through. "Jans" too wanted to step out of his ring-eared part and get back into his own clothing. But the sheriff and constable would have none of it. Nor would they permit the leader, Largay, to exchange his unaccustomed wooden peg for the usual concealed artificial limb.

So there the ridiculous quartet sat in their cells, by turns fuming and begging, as the growing crowd about the jail filed jeeringly past them. Later in the morning they were led handcuffed through the street to the justice's quarters where they were formally charged with unlawful entrance and attempted robbery.

"And now, Mr. Largay," the coroner took charge, in a continuation of his own investigations, "suppose you tell us the truth about your

movements at the Green Monkey Inn on the night of the murder."

The thief blanched.

"I didn't do it," he declared, the suave genteel manner that he had affected during his earlier testimony gone now and his natural low character showing. "I didn't do it, I tell you."

"But you *were* in the dead man's room at two-thirty in the morning?"

"Yes."

"You went there made up like Captain Kegg?"

"Yes."

"It was you that the Ott boy saw in the hall?"

"Yes."

"But why did you conceal all this in your earlier testimony?"

"Well," the thief spoke reluctantly, "we were going to pull that job at the Towers, and I was afraid you'd get wise. I was afraid you might think I did the other too."

"Are you really an actor, Largay?"

"Yes—I work at it some."

"But isn't it true that practically all of your earlier testimony was a lie?"

"Yes. I had to put up a front. Emil Rulens had told us that old Kegg kept millions out there. We didn't want to run the chance of losing it."

"Where did you come from on the morning of the tragedy?"

"Chicago."

"And you had no intention of going to Madison, as you testified?"

"No. The engagement we spoke about there was just a set-up."

"How did you get into Whispering Towers?"

"Well, we caught the little Chinese kid that morning on his bicycle and shut him up in an old hut that Rulens had told us about. When the head-hunters and Jans came out that night to look for him, we just picked them off one after another and tied them all up, the old guy included."

"Whose scheme was that, Largay?"

"Emil Rulens'. I think now he was all fishy about that fortune out there. We couldn't find anything. We thought we'd find a strong-room, with old sea chests in it, filled with pirate loot. We found plenty of dungeons, and stuff like that. Old Kegg saw to the dungeons when he planned his crazy place, never thinking that some day he'd be locked up there himself. They served us well. But there was no trace of a strong-room, or anything in the way of loot."

"And I suppose when Emil Rulens worked out the scheme he picked you for the captain's part on account of your artificial limb?"

"Yes. He needed a big guy with a peg. So that's how I got in on it."

"He picked you for the captain, he had two others of the right build for the head-hunters,

and still another for the Portuguese. But what part was he going to play himself?"

"None. He was just going to handle the prisoners and direct the search."

"Had he ever been in the castle before?"

"No, but he had some pictures showing us how to make up. I found out though that my picture of Kegg was about fifteen years old. So I made some changes after I got there."

"I see. It was you who came to town yesterday and cashed a five-thousand-dollar check?"

"Yes—we made the old man sign it."

"What did you do with the money?"

"The sheriff got it."

"Largay," the coroner then spoke with deadly earnestness, "did you kill Emil Rulens?"

"No," the thief cried, white-lipped. "It wasn't me, I tell you. I didn't do it."

"Do you know who did kill him?"

"It was his brother, I think."

"But if you had no part in the crime, what were you doing in the dead man's room at two-thirty in the morning?"

"I couldn't sleep with the thought of what was coming—all that treasure and everything. So I got to fooling around with the stuff I was going to use. Finally I decided to go down the hall and show it to Rulens, to see what he thought of my make-up."

"Largay, do you realize that if it weren't for

the Ott boy's testimony that you'd be held for murder?"

"Yes, coroner—but I didn't do it, I tell you."

"What makes you so sure the twin brother did it?"

"Well, Emil knew something—he wouldn't tell me what it was—but he had some kind of a hold on his brother—and planned later to use it to get some money out of him. So I think the brother, to save himself, just bumped Emil off."

"What do you know about the monkey?"

"The monkey? Say, I don't know anything about it. But I'm glad it didn't climb up to *my* window."

"Have you any idea where Antone Rulens and his wife are now?"

"No."

Dory and I had left the captain in great misery, as he had been imprisoned below with no regard for his swollen leg. Following the four thieves' arraignment and examination, we got Dr. Arnoldson to go out to the castle with us to see if something couldn't be done to lighten the old man's suffering.

Fu Wong heard us coming long before we got there and was at the gate to admit us.

"Great captain in very much bad pain," he told us, long-faced, as he hung to the side of the car till we stopped at the castle entrance.

"Yes, you young scamp," Dr. Arnoldson spoke

lightly, "and it was largely through you last night that I had a very much bad scare. I heard Dory bellowing at someone below, after he and Poppy went out. But when I got there, there was no one in sight."

"Fu Wong climb vine to tell honorable Poppy Ott of great captain's misfortune, but vine very poorly cooperate."

"Well," laughed Dr. Arnoldson, as he went on in with his medicine case, "we'll have to give that vine a good talking to. It certainly should have cooperated with you in the emergency."

"You haven't told us yet," I reminded the Chinese boy, as he and I and Dory waited below, "how you got out of the cabin in the woods."

"Yes," Dory put in quickly, "go ahead and tell us about it. But for Pete's sake talk like a human being, if you can."

"Fu Wong proceed most obligingly with much American briefness. Go on bicycle to inn. Then start on bicycle for Towers. Evil hirelings make jump out. Fu Wong taken to cabin in woods. Tied up. One day—maybe two day proceed slowly. Evil hirelings come bring food and water. Then Fu Wong make escape and follow road to Towers. Find very brutal impostor in charge. Poor captain in irons. Fu Wong suspect vile plot to rob gracious captain. Evil impostor see Fu Wong in castle and give chase. Fu Wong escape into woods. Make for town.

Evil hirelings await silently in road near town and give more chase. Fu Wong start up vine. Vine very unobliging. Get caught. Get very much tied up like American boys. Make escape in Towers with knife concealed in garment. Follow secret passage from locked cell. Free most honorable American boys. Trot boy find Fu Wong's story very well short?"

"Yes," Dory laughed. "That was swell. We know everything now."

"Little Chinese boy very much grateful for word of praise from clever son of worthy detective," the boy lapsed into his usual wordy style.

And then he too laughed, as he knew what was going on in our minds.

"But how did you ever happen to meet up with old Kegg?" Dory questioned curiously.

"Old Kegg, very disrespectful way to speak of much worthy old gentleman," came the gentle rebuke.

"My mistake," Dory laughed. "I meant Captain Kegg."

"American boys would like to hear story of little Chinese boy from very beginning?" we were asked.

"Yes," I told him. "Let's have it."

"Once upon a time," he began naïvely, "very beautiful little Chinese mamma go take pleasant walk in rose garden with Chinese papa, just home from long trip on great American ship. Very

beautiful little Chinese mamma say, let us pluck a rose, papa, and to-night the gods will make it into a little Chinese boy whom we will keep forever for our own. So Chinese papa say, very well. So Chinese mamma take pick of most beautiful rose and in morning—what you think?" came eagerly.

"What?" asked Dory.

"In morning where rose had been was little Chinese boy named Fu Wong Pu."

"And you're sure the rose wasn't a cabbage?" joked Dory.

"Then," the boy proceeded gravely, "very much great unhappiness come to little Chinese mamma when she learn that tiny baby have eyes only in ears. Chinese papa go away on ship and never come back. Then, when little Chinese boy reach twelve, come letter from great America. Chinese papa long ago die at sea, ship captain say in letter to Chinese mamma, who then make pack of Fu Wong's garments with silver and Fu Wong set sail to be cabin boy to great captain in home in Wisconsin. Since then Chinese mamma go to great heavenly glory. Now Fu Wong little Chinese orphan, but very much well taken care of by noble captain."

"And is it true," Dory asked eagerly, "that the captain is an old pirate?"

"Servant who tattle master's secrets make

most untrustworthy friend," the boy replied quietly.

"I get you," laughed Dory.

"Fu Wong very happy here with great captain, but sometimes very lonely. Make much warm friend with monkey which captain bring with him when he quit sea. Then monkey die."

Dr. Arnoldson came down then, with word that the captain was resting easier, and soon we were on our way back to town.

"Say, Uncle Karl," Dory spoke gravely, "do you think dad would object to having another boy in the family?"

"Why?" laughed Dr. Arnoldson. "Are you thinking of adopting Poppy?"

Up went Dory's freckled nose.

"*Him?* Say, I don't know who'd want him. I'm talking about that little Chinese boy. He's an orphan—he just told us about it. And didn't you notice how wistful he looked when we drove off? It must be terribly lonesome for him out here. And, honest!—I'd like to have him for a brother."

"Well, that's kind of you, Dory. You can take it up with your parents. But I doubt if old Kegg will consent to the separation. He's all wrapped up in that boy. I just found that out. And probably some day he'll leave the boy a great part of his fortune."

"A private fortune, Uncle Karl?" laughed Dory.

"It isn't improbable. Certainly the old man had some compelling reason for setting up his home here, so far from the sea."

"Fu Wong's father was one of his crew."

"Yes, I know. So were the head-hunters, and Jans. The old man took the little Chinese boy in, because of some debt due the dead father."

"Do you know," I then spoke up, "that kid would make a swell detective—with those ears of his. He can hear talk that nobody else can. Think of the swell stuff he could pick up! Why, he could stand in the street and hear a gang of crooks plotting together seven floors up."

"Do you really believe that, Poppy?" Dory asked curiously.

"Well, maybe I put it too strong. But he certainly could pick up a lot of stuff, all right. He'd be worth his weight in gold to a detective."

"I'll tell dad," Dory spoke eagerly.

"And now, boys," Dr. Arnoldson spoke whimsically, "I have something to tell you. I had a long distance call this morning from Canada. It was from your father, Dory. And, Poppy, your father was there too. I can tell you now why you boys were brought together here so mysteriously."

"Well, hurry up with it," Dory begged.

"Yes," I spoke with similar eagerness, "let's hear it."

"Your fathers will be here to-morrow morning. So I won't attempt to go into detail. But it was all a scheme to get the two of you interested in detective work. Dory, you know how your father feels about you. He's always wanted you to carry on his work. And, Poppy, your father has felt the same about you. He has always wanted you to be a detective when you grew up. But he made such a mess of it himself that he was afraid to speak of it openly to you. So he and Harrison Trot got together, finding they had much the same problem. They worked out a mystifying scheme which they hoped would stir up in you two a new interest in mystery solving. And to make it impossible for you to call on them for help, they both disappeared. Your mother, Dory, is visiting friends in Boston—I just had a wire from her too. The newspaper stories about the crime here alarmed her. Your dad, and Poppy's dad, were just getting started on a camping trip, expecting later to have you two join them, when word of the crime reached them, and they phoned me accordingly."

"Did you find out about the monkey's paw?" Dory asked eagerly.

"Yes, Dory. And please remember, as I go on, that neither of your fathers knew, when they arranged for your meeting at the Towers gate,

that there was a monkey there. But there *was* a Green Monkey Inn in town. They begged you to use your wits, figuring, if you did, you'd instantly associate the queerly-named inn with the instructions in the cipher, which read: LOOK IN THE SHADOW OF THE MONKEY'S PAW AT HIGH NOON. The monkey's paw referred to, of course, is the outstretched paw in the monkey-shaped sign in front of the inn. But so much other monkey stuff had gone before that none of us even thought of the painted monkey sign."

"What did dad do?" asked Dory. "Bury something there?"

"I imagine so. You can find out this noon."

Dory looked at me.

"What do you know about that, Poppy?"

"It certainly isn't what I thought," I told him weakly.

"The whole plan miscarried from the start," Dr. Arnoldson declared.

"Yes," growled Dory, with a dark look at me, "thanks to old butter-fingers over there losing his half of the cipher."

What we later found "in the shadow of the monkey's paw" was another halved cipher, containing reference to a hollow tree in a town fifty miles north. In this way our scheming fathers had laid a mystifying trail behind them which was to have concluded in their Canadian camp.

By that time it was hoped that we'd be so firmly attached to each other, and so imbued with the excitement of the chase, that nothing could turn us from the added plans made for us.

The extraordinary birthday gift and liberal check (I got my money back, of course) were perfectly understandable now. And I've always been sorry that Dory and I were denied that planned trip north. Had we got started right I know that we would have finished right, though I'm not saying what our final decision might have been.

That afternoon Dory and I found the dead monkey in the stuffy inn attic. It had been hidden under a pile of old carpet, and with it was a stout rope showing how it had been let down to my window sill.

While we were in the attic we heard a faint moaning sound from one of the partitions. When this was broken down we found a secret room, and bound and gagged on the floor were the innkeeper and his wife, and near them the dead body of the man who had poisoned the frankfurters.

Having been without food and water for almost two days, the prisoners were in bad shape. They were put to bed under Dr. Arnoldson's care, and no attempt was made to question them at the time. Later an inconspicuous funeral was held from the undertaking parlor, and the two

half-brothers—Emil and Adolf Rulens—were put to final rest beside their father in the Rockcliff cemetery.

An early marriage of Manton Rulens', in Bohemia, had turned out unhappily. The wife died, leaving a baby boy. The husband married again, more happily, and emigrated to America, leaving the child of his first wife with her people, where he grew up into a sullen morbid-minded man.

Having done well in America, Manton Rulens sent Antone to Bohemia to bring the half-brother back to enjoy the family's good fortunes. Antone brought back a wife, but the half-brother had disappeared. Later he turned up at the Rulens' home, where he unjustly accused his father of depriving him of his birthright. A fight ensued, and then is when the story got out that a friend of the family had been kicked on the head by a horse. Adolf was brought home from the Madison hospital a periodic madman and for more than a year was confined in the attic, part of the time in the secret room that had been built for him and which he never forgot. One night he escaped, and months later it was learned that he had been picked up in the east, and lodged in an asylum in Maine. It was thought best by the family to leave him there.

Antone was not the scallawag that old Patsy O'Toole had pictured, nor had the mouselike little innkeeper in any way defrauded his twin

brother. Manton trusted his son Antone. During what was considered the lifetime of Adolf, the trust fund was administered honestly, Adolf benefiting. One winter the asylum burned to the ground, and it was thought that Adolf had perished with the other inmates. But he had escaped and he showed up in Rockcliff the same day I did, after wide wandering. He had learned somehow that his hated half-brother Emil was coming that night. The switching of the meat packages in the bakery never was intended—the poisoned frankfurters were intended for Emil Rulens, though how the madman expected to get them into his half-brother's hands will always remain a mystery. It was one of the many irrational turns that the unsound brain took.

The madman, intent on killing his half-brother, got into my room first—coming down from the attic on a rope. It was he who removed my screen. Finding he was in the wrong room, he went out on the rope and swung to the other window. The crime committed, with its misleading touches, he went out the door, leaving it unlocked, and up to the attic, where he retrieved the dangling rope. Having earlier stolen the dead monkey, he then left it down to my window sill. Why? No one will ever know what his object was, or why he repeated the act, and even tried to get into my room from the hall. It was

learned that he died in the secret room of heart failure—a blessing to all.

Antone Rulens suspected his wife of the crime, after things she had said while they were anxiously discussing the twin brother's presence in the inn. Afraid that she would speak damagingly in her delirium, he foolishly conceived the idea of hiding her in the secret room in the attic, till she was better. The two never left the inn at all, as was reported. This explains how they fell into the madman's hands.

And so the mystery, with its many misleading angles, was completely cleared.

I had a long talk with dad when he arrived. He wanted to give up his Tutter business and move to Madison, so that Dory and I could be together to carry out the plans that had been made for us. But I wouldn't hear to the change at first. Give up my Tutter chums, particularly good little Jerry Todd? Never!

But when it came time to leave Dory, I found I didn't want to separate from him either! I found that he meant just as much to me as Jerry. And I found myself eager to try my hand at another mystery.

So to dad's great joy I consented to the move. And here my story ends.

My next book will deal with the first detective case undertaken by Ott, Trot & Pu. For clever

little Fu Wong became an important part of the partnership too.

THE HIDDEN DWARF! That will be the title of my next book—our first strange case. And it's coming soon!

THE END

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